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THE ETHICAL WORLD-CONCEPTION OF THE NORSE PEOPLE

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND LITERATURE, IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

(DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION)

BY
ANDREW PETER FORS

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1904

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"The *Sittengeschichte* of the extensive period—no less than a thousand years—which our treatment embraces has not as yet been written; but he who does undertake to write it will undoubtedly have occasion to deplore, in the case of numerous portions of his subject, the scantiness of the material at his command."—P. D. CH. DE LA SAUSSAYE, *The Religion of the Teutons*, p. 401.

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Corpus Poeticum Boreale, by G. VIGFUSSON AND F. YORK POWELL. A prose translation into English of old Norse poetry; less reliable philologically.

Younger Edda, by R. B. ANDERSEN. Translation and commentaries.

The Old Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England, by G. STEPHENS. An exhaustive archæological work.

Nordens Urinvånare, by S. NILSSON. A scholarly archæological work in Swedish on the aborigines of the North.

The Northern Library, edited by J. SEPHTON AND F. YORK POWELL. Presenting in English the *King Olaf Tryggwason Saga*, the *Færeyinga Saga*, and the *Sverrissaga*, throwing valuable light on pagan usages and conditions in the North.

The Saga Library, edited by WILLIAM MORRIS AND EIRIKR MAGNUSSON. Containing, among other literary monuments, the *Heimskringla*.

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Other works have also been consulted for suggestions and interpretations, while textual quotations have always been taken from their sources, and in all instances either directly translated from the Icelandic or verified by the original.

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ABBREVIATIONS.

MYTHIC HYMNS.

Völ.=*Völuspa.*
Vaf.=*Vafthrudnismal.*
Gri.=*Grimnismal.*
Hraf.=*Hrafnagaldr Odins.*
Veg.=*Vegtamskvida.*
Hav.=*Havamal.*
Hym.=*Hymiskvida.*
Thrym.=*Thrymskvida.*
Alv.=*Alvissmal.*
Har.=*Harbardsliod.*
Skir.=*Skirnismal.*
Rig.=*Rigsmal.*
Lok.=*Lokasenna.*
Fiol.=*Fiolsvinnsmal.*
Hynd.=*Hyndluliod.*
Grou.=*Grougaldr.*
Sol.=*Solarliod.*
Skaldsk.=*Skaldskaparmal.*

HEROIC LAYS.

Völun.=*Völundarkvida.*
Helg.=*Helgarkvida Hiörvards Sonar.*
H. H. I=*Helgarkvida Hudingsbana Fyrri.*
H. H. II=*Helgarkvida Hudingsbana Onnur.*
S. F. I=*Sigurtharkvida Fafnisbana Fyrsta.*
S. F. II=*Sigurtharkvida Fafnisbana Onnur.*
S. F. III=*Sigurtharkvida Fafnisbana Thridja.*
Faf.=*Fafnismal.*
Sigr.=*Sigrdrifumal.*
Bryn.=*Brynhildarkvida.*
Guth. I=*Guthrunarkvida Fyrsta.*
Guth. II=*Guthrunarkvida Onnur.*
Guth. III=*Guthrunarkvida Thridja.*
Oddr.=*Oddrunargratr.*
Atla.=*Atlakvida.*
Atla. Gr.=*Atlamal in Groenlenzku.*
Gudr.=*Gudrunarhvot.*
Hamd.=*Hamdismal.*
Gun. Sl.=*Gunnars Slagr.*
Grot.=*Grottasongr.*

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS AND EQUIVALENTS.

C. P. B.=*Corpus Poeticum Boreale.*
N. L.=*Northern Library.*
S. L.=*The Saga Library.*
E. E.=*Elder Edda.*
Y. E.=*Younger Edda.*
R. L.=*Ragnar Lodbrok Saga.*
Her.=*Hervarasaga.*
Spa="prophecy."
Mal="hymn."
Kvida="lay" (*visa* in Swedish, as found in folklore).
Liod="song" (longer).
Gratr="lament."
Hvot="incitement."
Slagr="melody" (strike on the harp).
Songr="song" (shorter).
Hudingsbana="Hudingcide."
Fafnisbana="Fafniscide."

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

1. *World-conception.*—"Conception," in its psychological sense taken here, has been defined as "the last, finishing process by which consciousness takes possession of an object."[1] "World-conception" would then mean a "view" or "way of looking at" and "taking in" the world as a fact of experience. Upon inquiry into the history of culture, in primitive times as well as among the lowest savages of today, we shall find that each and every people has had its own peculiar view of the world in which it has lived, and thereby of the universe as a whole and of mankind at large, so far as it has been able at all to entertain such images from its varied experiences and endowments. These conceptions, as far as they may have been formed, have also received their peculiar coloring from the environments and the hereditary traits of the individuals and peoples entertaining them. Hence arises a variety of world-conceptions, each finding its appropriate expression through certain geniuses, who in various times and climes have been known as prophets and priests, poets and philosophers. Social institutions, traditions, literary monuments, and archæological finds, as products of their times and its seers, remain to tell the tale. To these we must turn, if we would find out what kind of a life- and world-conception a given people has had. In the expression "world-conception" we would thus include what German writers term *Welt- und Lebens-Anschauung.*

2. *Ethical world-conception.*—The world as it appears to consciousness may be "viewed" from various view-points and aspects. As it first meets our senses, it might be held to be only an aggregate of objects governed by certain observable laws—a huge mechanical organism. These laws in operation would suggest the phenomena of power and motion, which in turn may call forth the contemplation of man's relation to it all. Thus the primitive man and the untutored savage of today, as much as the thinker and scholar of any age, may attempt to arrive at a sort of a unifying theory of the world and of life.[2] Or one might obtain a world-picture from meditating on persons and their actions, trying to penetrate into the motives of the agent, reaching a moral and spiritual view of the world that may satisfy the craving for a unitary orderly world-conception. At

[1] *The Universal Cyclopædia, sub voce.*

[2] FRAZER, *The Golden Bough*, Vol. I, p. 9.

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this higher step in "the ascent of man," his relation to the world becomes intensified, since the world to him becomes, not simply one of order, but one full of meaning and of personal interest. The world of laws is, indeed, full of deep significance, but the world of motives carries with it in addition the essential meaning of the personal world, the spiritual law in the natural world (not the reverse, as Drummond gives it, at least in the title of his book).[1] In the words of Paulsen: "The ultimate motive impelling men to meditate upon the nature of the universe will always be their desire to reach some conclusion concerning the meaning, the source, and the goal of their lives."[2] Fichte says somewhere: "The world-order is in the last analysis a moral order."

3. *The Norse world-conception.*—Nature and life—*i. e.*, conduct—stand in a constant relation of interchange—a fact that was apparent even to primitive peoples; for, as Swift puts it: "The most uncivilized parts of mankind have some way or other climbed up into the conception of a God."[3] And since their gods are really in effect, and so far as the moral aspect of this present life is concerned, unreached moral ideals, this "climbing" is natural to and worthy of a human soul. We dare not therefore, deny the ancients the capacity for fruitful ethical conceptions; nor should the vast disparity in conditions and institutions obscure for us the unity and continuity between them and us. Thus among the Norse people the conception of the Yggdrasil's ash is a world-picture as comprehensive as it was fitting (see Gri.). "The picture that is unfolded before our eyes is that of a world-tree under which the gods hold *thing*."[4] This world-tree, according to Rydberg, represents life in its totality—the biological, the moral, and the divine.[5] It is, indeed, a tree of life—that is, a vivid picture of the living world of man—presenting in a fascinating way its mystery, its growth and decay, the meaning of this world, so far as the Norse people could interpret it. This image would also, in the tracing of its invisible roots, afford play for the ethical sense, the philosophical bent, and the poetical mood. Hence Carlyle calls it "the tree of existence," and Thorpe "the emblem of all living nature,"[6] while Grundtvig exclaims: "Gothic it is to the core, cannot be painted, still less carved in stone."[7] The Ragnarök myth is another expressive world-view in Norse mythology. In the Yggdrasil myth the Norse system circumspects, and in the Ragnarök myth introspects, the old world-powers. It is the inestimably valuable peculiarity of the Eddic mythology, as compared with other systems,

[1] JASTROW, *The Study of Religion*, p. 176; and my thesis, *The Rational Grounds of Christian Truth*, p. 7.

[2] *Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 3. [4] SAUSSAYE, *Religion of the Teutons*, p. 349.

[3] *Tale of a Tub*, VIII. [5] *German Mythology*, Vol. II, p. 22. [6] *Nordens Mythologi*, p. 154.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 229. See also KEYSER, *Nordmændenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendom*, pp. 24, 25.

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that, besides beginning with a theogony, it also closes with a theochthony. And this peculiarity lends Norse mythology especially to ethical interpretation and application. The entire Norse system, therefore, may be regarded as an expression of the consciousness of a moral order of the world.

4. *Its mythological expression.*—The mythological representation afforded primitive man the greatest play for his imagination—a state of soul very natural to his untutored, but intensely inquisitive, mind. In the myth, says Wundt, "the unity of the primitive world-theory finds expression."[1] The myth is the mental medium through which primitive man views nature, and the mode in which, to his satisfaction, he reconciles its outer workings with his inner consciousness. It is the physical and psychical mode in which man projects himself into all those phenomena which he is trying to apprehend and perceive. Hence, Max Müller holds that "it is as a necessary phase in the historical development of human thought that mythology becomes of real importance to every student of philosophy;" for it "represents a chapter in the history of the ascent of man, which contains the key to many of the most perplexing riddles in the growth of the human mind."[2] By observing and studying the beneficent or injurious effects on himself of the special or typical personifications, primitive man was enabled in an empirical way to estimate their value. The ethicizing in this way of mythical conceptions was something that struck Tacitus very favorably in observing the Teutonic beliefs, for he found in them something directly the reverse of the external and materialistic character of the Roman. He states that the Teutons had no idols (*nulla simulacra*), and he attributes this to the lofty ideas they entertained of their gods (*ex magnitudine coelestium*).[3] We know, though, that in the North there were numerous images in their temples, as at Upsala and in Gotland; but from a number of stories it is evident that the gods were conceived of as operative in the images. The images, then, were not considered as gods.[4] Impressed by the energies and clashings of nature's efforts, the Norse people were seized with the bold design of pouring the life of man into it as a mold or model. Natural phenomena were, therefore, at first the dominant factors in their combinations, but as the contemplations of moral and social developments widened, man and his relations became paramount, and we thus find the presentations of the mythologists breaking away from the minutiæ of physical analogy. As an example of this ethicizing tendency in the Norse mythology we may instance

[1] *Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 5. [2] *Science and Mythology*, Vol. I, pp. 44, 287. [3] *Germania*, chap. 9.

[4] *Njalssaga*, chap. 87; *Færeyingasaga*, chap. 23; *Olaf Tryggvasson Saga*, chap. 173.

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the Baldur myth. This sun-myth, occasioned by the death of day at sunset, was soon transferred to the death of the summer; then, lifted a little higher, it was applied to the world-year; finally, its mythology leaves by degrees the physical basis, and ethical attributes are added, and the myth, with its incidents, typifies, especially in connection with the ethicizing of the Loki myth, the good and the evil, the virtues and the vices, of gods and of men. Hence Grundtvig's pertinent remark, that the Baldur myth is rather an expression for the history of spirit on earth, and not so much of equinox, which the Norse people could see directly every year.[1]

5. *Development of its ethical precepts.*—Moral terms, ideals, and precepts, as we distinguish them today, though with divergent theories of application, are, in the words of Wundt, "the product of a long course of development, which has taken the form of a continuous deepening and inwardizing of ethical conceptions."[2] The real effort after ethical idealization in mythology does not appear before we come to the hero-legends. These bring before us the inmost moral convictions of the people; for, as Wundt observes, even after their humanization—*i. e.*, bringing the nature-gods in to connection with the different aspects of human life and human intercourse[3]—the gods still retain their old unapproachableness, while the heroes will always appear as attainable ideals of human virtue.[4] We may also remember in this connection, in regard to the Teutons, that, as Tacitus observed, there was an air of mystery, a dread of the gods, while there was an intimate connection with the life of the tribe in their religion. We cannot conceive man ascribing ethical qualities to his gods until he himself has proceeded far enough along the line of moral development to have established for his own guidance some ethical principles, however simple these may have been. And this ethical application was furthered by the social activity which, as an effort, appears the moment that the attempt was made to regulate the relationship between men. Man soon comes to find out that life is not a purely physical or animal state, but the self-centered realization of an intelligent soul. Hence morality, instead of being a mere means to more perfect life, as though we could live a human life without it, is, in fact, a part of our lives—yea, indeed, the center, and we might say the life of life, in all human existence. And it was through human society, or what may be termed the social bond and social effort, that men came to a full realization of the meaning of life. "Self is socially

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 325. See also FRAZER, *The Golden Bough*, Vol. III, pp. 456, 457.

[2] *Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 44. [3] See SAUSSAYE, *op. cit.*, p. 285. [4] *Ethics*, Vol. I, pp. 86–95.

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realized."[1] Man is morally destined to live in society, where limits must exist marked by positive laws and supported by public authority.[2] In the sagas or hero-legends the Norse people have pictured their social life. Their conception of life is, therefore, continuous, so that the myths and the sagas have mutually influenced one another. Hence, though the myths have supplied much material for the world-conception apparent in the sagas, the myths themselves have in the hands of the mythologists obtained their ethical character from ideas supplied by the sagas. We shall therefore draw from both of these sources in this study of the Norse ethical world-conception, considering the conceptions and precepts in the sagas quite as effective among the people as those of their mythology. Saussaye regards the heroic sagas of greater importance than the god-myths, for the purpose of an inquiry into the moral ideals embodied in living personalities. "To separate the god-myths and the heroic sagas is to commit a psychological error, which can only lead to incorrect results."[3] This is especially true when we attempt to get at a certain conception of a people, which must be continuous, if it is indigenous at all.

6. *Plan of presentation.*—For the sake of clearness, we shall first present the Norse mythological conceptions so far as they represent the ethical world-conception of this people. In a following chapter we shall give some specimens of their ethical precepts, leaving to the concluding chapter the discussion of various topics which will further bring to prominence the importance of the Norse system as ethical.

[1] WALLACE, *Lectures on Morality*, p. 366.

[2] BRENTANO, *Origin of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong*.

[3] *Religion of the Teutons*, p. 404; RYDBERG, *Germanisk Mythologi*, Vol. II, pp. 381 ff.

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CHAPTER II.

NORSE MYTHOLOGICAL CONCEPTIONS, EXPRESSING THE ETHICAL WORLD-CONCEPTION OF THIS PEOPLE.

1. *The Norse mythology.*—In its peculiar form, as it lies before us in song and saga, this mythology may be considered as having sprung into being with the Teutonic race, and as being, in its fundamental principles, inherited and propagated by its two branches, the Norse and the German, so that in its further development by each of them it followed a peculiar direction.[1] As to its connection with older myth-formations of the Aryan stock, see Rydberg.[2] It was in Scandinavia, especially in Iceland, that the Norse people worked out the peculiar world-conception which as an heritage is left in their literary monuments, their institutions, yea in their characteristics and influences down to the present time as apparent among the northern peoples. And it is with this world-conception as ethical that we are here concerned. In "the ocean-surrounded" Iceland as "freedom's refuge," these people could unfold their ideas and become themselves. It is also this northern branch alone of the advancing Teutonic race that left enough literary monuments in song and saga to enable us to construe its conception of life. On the genuineness of Norse mythology, as distinct from the German, whatever that may have been, Professor S. Nilsson, in his extensive and excellent archæological work entitled *Nordens Urinvånare*, has some very conclusive facts and arguments, scattered throughout this classical work, but most forcibly presented in the splendid introductions to the different parts. In the Norse mythology we meet with a series of conceptions which are not the fruits of metaphysical reflection, but the product of that instinct which is especially human—the apprehension of the world as an orderly whole and the attempt to interpret its meaning. Of these beliefs, so diverse in time and degree, some are indigenous, while some are borrowed or grafted more or less completely on the native mythology. Thus the barbaric myth of chaos as a giant slain by the gods for the construction of cosmos, and the archaic myth of the cow as the world-nourisher, are primeval conceptions common to Indian and Teutonic fancy; while the Yggdrasil and Ragnarök myths, whatever their origin, lent themselves, as already indicated, to the tendency of the Norse system of interpreting the meaning of this present

[1] Keyser, *op. cit.*, p. 86. [2] *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 375.

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world. The Valhall and Valkyrie conceptions, so especially Scandinavian, are only the later viking reflections of warrior life, and, according to the editors of *C. P. B.*, "the last act, as it were, of the heathen religious drama" as played out in the North, which, however, "will always be a noble memory to us, as representing one aspect of the master-minds of the Scandinavian peoples at the period when they were helping to mold modern Europe." But some of the characters of this later stratum are really "the old Aryan and even pre-Aryan . . . . archaic figures and fancies, merely employed in a new connection, and mingled with new personifications."[1] Hence for our purpose we may regard the Norse mythology as one continuous growth, of which we shall now notice the ethical tendency.

2. *The Norse conception of conflict in nature.*—The keynote of Norse mythology in its earliest stage, as also in its later developments—a keynote which lends it especially to ethical applications—is the conception of nature as endowed with life, and not least that a contest is waged and an antithesis present among the powers of nature.[2] And this conflict in the natural world, apparent in the struggle annually renewed between summer and winter, as presented in the Baldur myth, the feats of Thor, and the pranks of Loki—this conflict was especially intensified by the fact that, in the main, the life of the Norse people was a life of struggle with nature. The northern countries, especially Iceland, "the ocean-surrounded depository" (Stephen), where the Norse songs and sagas assumed their present form and content, were especially remarkable for wild grandeur of scenery, subject to sudden extreme climatic changes, involving great disturbances. To this observant "nature-folk," these would be efforts of great unseen powers, working now for good, now for evil. Hence we find in the Norse mythology various classes of beings, among whom there is a constant conflict. The most decided struggle is between the Æsir and the Jotuns or giants. The *Völuspa* represents the entrance of evil into the world as the result of the passions and disunions of the gods.[3] But even prior to these world-powers there were at the organizing of cosmos certain wild, unorganized forces that escaped, and with these giants, gods and men must strive till the very end. Evil thus seems to have been taken for granted, as an essential property of that

[1] *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, Introduction, pp. 101, 105, 107.

[2] SCHRADER, *op. cit.*, p. 405, and KUHN, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

[3] As to the genuineness and importance of the world-drama presented in *Völuspa* we cannot, with Bugge, Bang, and Meyer, call this poem a learned product pieced together from Christian and classical models; nor, with Müllenhoff, regard it as the noblest product of Teutonic antiquity. Finnur Jonsson gives a sounder theory. He regards it as a dramatic effort of a sincere follower of the heathen faith to put heathen material in a Christian framework, in order to counteract the intruding Christian religion. It, therefore, contains heathen conceptions.

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chaotic matter out of which gods and men were evolved. Thus in a naïve way the Norse people conceived of the connection of physical and moral evil; while they distinctly emphasized the responsibility on the part of the personal world for the entrance of evil from the one sphere to the other. "Norse mythology has raised and extended the law of responsibility to the ethical constitution of the world."[1] We would call especial attention to this.

3. *The ethical transformation of its myths.*—The Norse conception of conflict in nature had thus a very natural application to the intellectual and moral nature of man. Tiele observes: "Like all ancient nations, the Teutons made at first no sharp distinction between moral and physical good and evil. But for the study of the development of religion, it is of the highest interest to observe how the same nature-myths underwent an ethical transformation among both Teutons and Persians, quite independent of each other, and with characteristic differences among each people; and how, consequently, while the forms remain the same, the development of religion advances with that of the nation."[2] For a comparison of the Norse and the Asiatic-Aryan myth-cycles see Rydberg.[3] "The same myths," continues Tiele, "which at first expressed simply the conflict between light and darkness, night and day, were afterwards transferred to the succession of seasons, because blended into one whole, and were applied to the entire course of the history of the world. It was then the necessary consequence that they were at the same time elevated by moral conceptions."[4] We have already instanced this in the case of the Baldur myth. In the Norse mythology we find this transformation quite apparent throughout. The connection between the physical and the spiritual is so close that it is often inseparable even in language, and everywhere we meet with proofs that the Norse people raised themselves to this higher conception. Thus Odin was not only lord over the whole physical world, but king also of the intellectual. "He gives victory to some, and wealth to others, readiness of speech to many, and wisdom to the children of men. He gives fair wind to sailors, song to poets, and manly valor to many a hero."[5] Heimdal not only represented the rainbow, but was also, as the watchman on this bridge, the benignant announcer of the divine care.[6] Thor was not only the thunder-god, but, in his many venturesome expeditions against the giants, also an example to the Norse farmer and the vikings of thrift, of courage, and of strength.[7] Vedar not only

[1] STERN, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[2] *Outline*, p. 196.
[3] *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 5–182.
[4] *Op. cit.*, pp. 196, 198.
[5] *Hymd.*, 3; see also *Ynglingasaga*, chaps. 6 and 7.
[6] *Gri.*, 13; *Gylf.*, chaps. 27 and 51.
[7] *Gylf.*, 44; *Hor.*; and *Hym.*, 11.

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reminded them of the boundless forests, but was looked upon as incorruptibility itself.[1] Baldur was not only the sun-god, but verily goodness and piety itself.[2] Tyr not only presided at war, he also represented honor and glory.[3] Frey and Freyia were not alone givers of fruitfulness, but signified also the germinating, beautifying, boundless love in the breast of man.[4] Nor was Loki only the fire-god, but to him were traced all tricks, evils, and lies.[5] More cases could be instanced of the spiritualizing and ethicizing tendency in the Norse mythology, but the above may now suffice. We shall, however, study a few of these myths a little closer and find out how they express the ethical conception of the Norse people.

4. *Odin.*—Immediately following the construction of the present world, the Norse mythology speaks of a time of peace among gods and men. But it vanished when the Æsir allowed the Jotuns to creep into their midst, and even formed unholy alliances with them to satisfy their desires. Then they began to employ their powers to their own advantage. But this only impaired their godlike powers, and gave their enemies the courage to begin the great conflict which was to endure during this present moral order. With what results we shall see farther on. But thus wails the *Edda* singer:

> Broken was the outer wall
> Of the Æsir burgh, ...
> Odin cast his spear,
> And mid the people hurled it:
> That was the first
> Warfare in the world.[6]

Hence the blame of allowing the evil to enter the world is referred to Odin, who was held responsible for the orderly cosmos. "The moral functions of the gods are identical with their position as guardians and defenders of *thing* and host."[7] In the second lay of *Helgi Hudingcide*, vs. 32, we read:

> Odin alone is cause of all the evil;
> For between relatives [perhaps Æsir and Vanir].
> He brought the runes of strife [struggle for gold].

In the lay of *Sigrdrifa*, vs. 2, the awakening maid says:

> Long have I slept,
> Long been with sleep oppressed,
> Long are the mortals' suffering!

[1] *Val.*, 51; *Gylf.*, 51.

[2] *Sigr.*, 6; *Völ.*, 44; *Gylf.*, 51; *Lok.*

[3] *Völ.*, 32–34; *Gylf.*, 49; *Husdrapa.*

[4] *Fiol.*, 22, *Her.*, 14.

[5] *Skir.*; *Gri.*, 5, 43; *Lok.* For primitive conceptions parallel to that of Loki, see remarks by FRAZER, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 319.

[6] *Völ.*, 28.

[7] SAUSSAYE, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

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Odin is the cause
That I have been unable
To cast off torpor.

From the earth the time of guiltless peace disappeared "when," as Keyser observes, "men became acquainted with the Jotun power of gold and set their minds and dependence upon it."[1] Hence Chaillu remarks: "Gullveig . . . . may be a metaphor for the thirst of gold being the root of all evil, and the cause of the first fight and manslaying in the world,"[2] *i. e.*, the world of the Norsemen. It is interesting to note in this connection some of the expressions, occurring in the Norse writings, for gold, such as the following: "man's baleful metal;" "the fire of the serpent's bed."[3] While Loki (the fire-god) was the real seducer, and gold was the material means he employed, yet, since Odin allowed it, he is said in that sense to be the "cause of all evil." He allowed the striving for gold, commercialism, to enter and disturb the peaceful home occupation of the Norse people, causing them even to enter upon vikingry. Thus did also Loki direct the hand of the blind god to kill the spotless Baldur; and Odin did, nay he could, not prevent it; for such are the influences in this world that we as "Odins" can only allow the circumstances to be and make the best of them—that is our ethical duty. The "Mill Song" in the Norse cycle of lays illustrates also *à la* Shylock the seductiveness of gold. Avarice is at the bottom of all the endless woes of the *Nibelungen* story and the Norse *Völsung* sagas, where many a Baldur was sacrificed.[4] For a comparison between the Norse and the *Rigveda* conceptions of the rise and development of evil, see RYDBERG, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 655 ff.

5. *Thor.*—The Northmen had a firm belief that physical evil—the destructive powers in nature—would be held in check during the beneficent reign of Odin. The friendly powers were centered in Thor. "Just as Thor went on adventures to conquer the giants with physical weapons and strength, so Odin fought them with spiritual weapons, by his searching questions."[5] The idea underlying the conception of Thor seems to be mighty physical forces exerted for the good of men and the world. Several myths connected with Thor show, however, that the Norse people also believed that there were certain agencies, material and spiritual, with which no conceivable embodiment of physical forces was able to contend.[6] Though not thus omnipotent, Thor was still regarded as a very beneficent god, being generally abroad on some expedition against the giants.[7] The

[1] KEYSER, *op. cit.*, p. 141. [2] CHAILLU, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 46.

[3] *Atla.*, 27; *Gudr.*, 26. See RYDBERG *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 94. Also a reference in *Lok.*, 24.

[4] SAUSSAYE, *op. cit.*, pp. 406, 407. [5] MUNCH, *op. cit.*, p. 84. [6] *Skaldsk.*, chap. 1.

[7] *Thrym.*; *Skaldsk.*, chaps. 1 and 2; *Thorsdrapa*.

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Thor cult, or the worship of beneficent powers of nature, so pervades Teutonic, and especially Norse, religion that it might almost be said to constitute that religion, and many of these conceptions still linger in the folk-consciousness of the Scandinavian peoples.[1] Grundtvig, who is very prone to spiritualize the Norse myths, says that Thor is "evidently the Norse expression for the living truth or true reality," and his chariot is "the course of time in the struggle of existence."[2] While certain mythologists and commentators may obtain such views of these nature-myths, the Norse people as such in their "folk-trow" were evidently contented with a comprehension in line with the more modest interpretation that we have presented above.[3] This beneficent contest was more helpful to them as a spur in life's struggles than any spiritual vision that towered above their mental and moral horizon. And this physical basis of the Thor myth is of better service to us in comprehending the rise and influence of their moral conceptions on the beneficent side, just as a proper interpretation of the Loki myth will present the same contest on the malevolent side.

6. *Loki.*—The myths about Loki reveal to us in their deeper meaning the ideas of the Norse people respecting the struggle between good and evil in the world. In these myths Loki appears as the real cause of all evil. If Loki is the same as Lodur, then he took part in the creation of man, giving the senses, the sources of evil desires.[4] The *Younger Edda* calls Loki the brother of Odin, and in *Lok.*, vs. 9, Loki says:

> Odin! dost thou remember
> When we in early days
> Blended our blood together?

Thus they were at least conceived of as foster-brothers. This is a nicer distinction ethically than the Persian conception of primeval twins.[5] Odin (*i. e.*, every noble man striving upward) comes into relation with nature to develop, ennoble, and elevate it; while Loki (misused personal freedom) comes in only further to develop the evil principle in treacherousness and craftiness. Loki is "the true impersonation," as Mogk puts it, "of a *thule* who takes delight in snapping his fingers at the company

[1] See PETERSEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 46 ff.; also UHLAND, *Der Mythen von Thor*. See also S. NILSSON, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 13, note, where he relates that only one hundred and fifty years ago this saying was very prevalent in Sweden when thunder was heard: "If there was no thunder (*Thor-dön*), the world would be destroyed by *trolls*." The author of this thesis can also testify that his grandfather related to him as a boy many stories of Thor's beneficent adventures, which stories were intended to convey certain moral lessons as well. And these observances were, of course, not scientific, with modern implications, but simply represented the beneficent intercession of Thor considered as of spiritual import. See also *Kil. Stobaeii Dessert. de Ceramius*, etc., p. 64; and *Leem. Lappm.*, p. 506.

[2] GRUNDTVIG, *op. cit.*, pp. 349, 354.

[3] See further FRAZER, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 183.

[4] SAUSSAYE, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

[5] *Yasna*, XXX, 3.

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round about him, but who always knows how to escape the net that is spread for him." Loki is generally represented as a mixed being, good and evil, but, as terrestrial, particularly the latter. He forms a significant contrast to all the other gods. He appears in this present world-order as the evil principle in all its varieties. He is not bound to any individual form:[1] like Odin, he pervades all nature. In *Lokasenna*, where he reviles the gods, he is addressed "thou framer of evil," and Thor rebukes him thus, "Silence, thou impure being;" while Loki himself confesses: "I have spoken that which my mind suggested."[2] Tiele observes concerning Loki that, when "the conflict of the powers of nature came to be transferred to the domain of ethics, he became the father of the destructive powers"—the evil conscience of the gods.[3] Harbard, in *Harbardsliod*, has been thought to be Odin, but Rydberg makes it probable that it is Loki who there accosts and mocks Thor—something that would be more like Loki than Odin.[4]

7. *Baldur*.—Andersen thinks that Baldur "represents and symbolizes in the profoundest sense the heavenly light of the soul and of the mind, purity, innocence, and piety;" that in this myth the Norse people "appreciated the light that fills the eye and blesses the heart, and were sensitive to the pain that cuts through the bosom of men, even into its finest and most delicate fibers."[5] And Grundtvig would, of course, run along the same line of interpretation. He thinks that Baldur is a deep expression and a great figure of the glory that surrounds life when it is viewed with an innocent eye in the eternal light; but which may, as the purest life shows, early disappear from earth, not to be called back before man understands aright the meaning of his existence. Thus Baldur is an expression for the history of spirit on earth.[6] Perhaps the most we can say in regard to the real conception that the Norse people as such may have had touching this beautiful myth, especially as compared with the Thor myth, leaving to its own value the above sophistry, would be this: The conflict in this world—that of the physical, which Thor would express, and that of the spiritual, which Baldur would exemplify—this life-struggle does not approach to its ideals without great sacrifices.[7]

8. *The contending principles*.—The conflict between good and evil has grown up with the world-life itself. This whole world-life is therefore a struggle between light and darkness, virtue and vice—a struggle, however, that shall end in the triumph of good over evil. Thus the great antago-

[1] *Gylf.*, chaps. 42, 50; *Bragarædhur*, chap. 1; *Skaldsk.*, chap. 2.
[2] *Lok.*, 47, 61, 64.
[3] *Outline*, p. 195.
[4] *Op. cit.*, Part II, pp. 296–327.
[5] *Norse Mythology*, pp. 293, 295.
[6] *Op. cit.*, p. 325.
[7] Concerning the genuineness of the Baldur myth see RYDBERG, *op. cit.*, Part II, pp. 203–295.

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nism which pervades the world-life shall be removed in a final encounter of the contending powers. Some time, however, during the present order of things, the gods are represented as having succeeded in binding certain terrible hostile powers—Loki, the Fenriswolf, and the Midgard Serpent. These two last, together with Hel, are represented in the Norse mythology as the hideous offspring of Loki; and they may, therefore, be regarded as the evil principle in its developments and results. Loki himself makes the net by which he is caught. The tempter, the author of evil, was at last firmly bound to the rock, but the evil seed he had sown grew and flourished. "Thus" says Wagner, "is crime, which threatens to corrupt the human race, bound by the apparent slight fetters of law, and as the power of the wolf was broken by the sword that of crime is kept under by the awards of justice. When a people no longer heeds the law and throws aside all civic order, crime frees itself from its fetters, and the nation rushes to its ruin as surely as Gripnir would be broken in the twilight of the gods, as surely as the All-Devourer would become freed from his chains and from the sword."[1] Our race, once good, has become corrupt; evil has the upper hand—such were the wailing tones that run through the later conceptions of the Norse mythology, whether this idea was derived from their only explanation of the presence of evil in the world, or whether it was occasioned by their national persecutions, as we shall indicate later, or perhaps rather developed from both experiences; for, as Saussaye says, "There is no need of assuming that in the depicting of this scene Christian influences have been at work. The touch . . . . is thoroughly in keeping with Teutonic ideas."[2] But the evil shall yet be vanquished and the guilt atoned for. This is the hope held out, the ideal striven for. And thus "is fulfilled," says Bunsen, "that sublime thought contained in the *Eddas:* that every sin must be expiated, even that of the gods."[3] So *Völuspa* proper closes thus:

> Yggdrasil's ash towering trembles,
> The old tree groans,
> And the giant [Loki] breaks loose.

The Æsir are then attacked, each one falling in the struggle, as do their assailants. Thereupon—

> The sun begins to darken,
> The earth sinks into the sea;
> The bright stars vanish from heaven.
> Vapor and fire rage,
> The high flames lick the sky.[4]

[1] WAGNER, *Asgard and the Gods*, p. 157.
[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 351.
[3] BUNSEN, *God in History*, p. 409.
[4] *Völ.*, 46, 57.

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Finally, *Gylf.* also carries out the motif of the vengeance. The original myth of Ragnarök perhaps ended here, drawing a veil over all things, plunging the earth again into darkness, as out of darkness it had merged. Ragnarök represents "the disappearance of Asa faith," says Grundtvig, "for the last of the Asa singers were finally brought to believe that the gods whom the first of these singers had pictured would naturally vanish with the living remembrance of and faith in them."[1]

9. *The final outcome.*—Life to the Norse people was in very truth "the meeting-place of two eternities" (Carlyle), both unknown. And since Odin allowed the struggle in this world—*i. e.*, since the indigenous conception of life to the Norse people was an ethical one—some ideal was held out to those heroically engaged in this struggle, which in the viking age took the shape of Valhal. And "the belief in Valhal," says Chaillu, "made the people of the North most powerful and skilled warriors; it infused into their minds an utter disregard of death, and led them to accomplish great deeds of valor in their own and distant lands . . . . To these men of old death was but one of the phases of their lives; it had no terrors for them, and they faced it smilingly, bravely, and contentedly. . . . . The victor often mourned that he had not been among the slain and chosen, and consoled himself by thinking that he must obtain more renown and do braver deeds before he could aspire to meet Odin. . . . . There is something grand and noble in their despising of life, and in aspiring, during its continuance, to do great and noble deeds."[2] An illustration of this we find in *Sverrissaga*, chap. 47. To die laughing, when the hour of death has struck, as does Ragnar Lodbrok in Krakumal; or dauntless, like the Jomsvikings, who gloriously, without semblance of fear, fall under the sword of Thorkel—that is what behooves men.[3] W. W. Gill, in his *Myths and Songs of the South Pacific*, p. 163, relates that the Mangaians think that "the spirits of those who die a natural death are excessively feeble and weak, as their bodies were at dissolution; whereas the spirits of those who are slain in battle are strong and vigorous, their bodies not having been reduced by disease." We must also here admit Grundtvig's inspiring interpretation of this genuine Norse belief. Valhal is "an expression," he says, "of the earthly immortality which with all people that have spirit and heart is something desired, and was with the Norse people an intense yearning and a living hope, and gained a special prominence and reality because of their deep feeling for the meaning of life, and because of their conception of the solidarity and co-operation of mankind for the eternal goal."[4] The reception of the fallen heroes into Valhal

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 479. [2] *The Viking Age*, Vol. I, pp. 420, 421. [3] *Jomsvikingasaga*, chap. xlvii.
[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 293. See also MÜLLENHOFF, *D. A.*, Vol. V, Part I, p. 69.

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was already an advance from the idea of continuation to that of retribution. In later developments of the Norse mythology we have clearly expressed the notion of retribution beyond the grave; for *Völuspa* expressly says of Gimle:

> The virtuous there
> Shall always dwell,
> And evermore
> Delights enjoy:

while it is also distinctly teaches that perjurers, murderers, and adulterers, shall wade through thick venom streams in Nastrand.[1] Thus it is evident that it was held that virtue, on the whole, and not bravery alone, assured one of a better life hereafter, while wickedness and vice were punished. It should also be remembered that Gimle and Nastrand referred to the state of things after Ragnarök, while Valhal and Hel had reference to the state of things between death and Ragnarök. For a full discussion of this distinction see Rydberg, especially as to the continuity and character of the meaning of punishment in time and after death.[2] Yet blasphemy and baseness might shut out even the bravest from Valhal. After Ragnarök the old world-powers, such as Odin and Thor, come into sight no more; they are renewed in their sons. Thus, when the conflict is over and the ideal is reached, the moral order is no more; it has given way to something else. We hold, with Saussaye, that, "while the presence of Christian influences in this eschatology cannot be gainsaid, it is yet not a mere copy of the apocalypse. The expectation that the world would be destroyed, and even that a restoration would follow, is not necessarily an idea that was foreign to the Teutons."[3] These conceptions, as also that one of "the mighty one" who comes from above to pronounce judgment,[4] are special features of the *Völuspa* as a poem presenting a world-drama.

10. *The beyond.*—It will be noticed that we have used such expressions as "the hereafter," "eternal," "spiritual," "religion," and such like. It is therefore proper to place these terms in their relation to ethics, as also to show how and why we admit them in a discussion of the Norse ethical system. It is characteristic of the ethical attitude toward the world that it never gets beyond the contrast of the actual and the possible. As moral beings, we can never exist without some still unreached ideal to serve as a spur to our activity, and as long as we are at the ethical level of existence, we constantly experience that the ideal recedes, or rather

[1] *Völ.*, 38, 39, 64; *cf. Gylf.*, 52.

[2] *Op. cit.*, Part II, pp. 402–25; also Part II, pp. 155–69; see also TACITUS, *Germania*, XII.

[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 353; *cf.* the Bavarian poem *Muspilli* of the ninth century.

[4] *Völ.*, 65. See also MÜLLENHOFF's vindication of this as of Teutonic origin, *D. A.*, V, 34.

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is changed, as it is approached, just because we ourselves have in the struggle onward changed, if we proceed at all. This internal conflict between the good, which we never quite attain, and the evil from which we never get quite free, this struggle onward and upward is of the very essence of morality; it is our very being. For morality is an endeavor to obtain some form of experience not yet existing. If, therefore, morality ever could actually attain what it aims at, it would in its very success cease to be an onward striving, and be transformed into a different and a higher form of experience. And this higher, or what may be called religious, experience is the shape into which the ethical experience is transformed in the attempt to force it into something completely attained. But in that very moment we must experience ourselves as being something more than finite individuals or subordinate parts of a world-system. To this we have to add a further observation. Not only is a standstill impossible in a world of acting personalities, but there is also a possible retrograde movement. Hence, while the predominent thought in the Norse system is the hope that the good will triumph over the evil, there is also, as we have already stated, a possible opposite result, not necessarily for the world-process as such, but possibly for the individual, temporarily at least. And the Norse could not conceive of the beyond but as in some way a justification of the present. There was no other way of resolving the conflict. At least the Norsemen may have held what De Quincey declares all men must hold who think at all about future things—"Some tranquillizing belief as to the future balances and the hieroglyphic meanings of human sufferings." Hence we have these non-ethical terms, above instanced, as necessary "hints." And still these mere "hints" concerning the beyond followed from the relative dualism set up, the ethicality of the entire Norse conception of life. Saussaye says that the description of the end to come is based in part on popular belief and in part on the poet's own fancy, and foreign sources do not constitute a factor in the production.[1] The circumvolution on a small scale has been repeated on a large. Day and night, summer and winter, amplified, are prefigurations of the destruction and renewal of all nature. This time and world were brought forth like every other phenomenon in it. They therefore pass away, and, like the year, are renewed again. In the myth of Baldur's death, with its conclusion, the birth of Vali, the idea of Ragnarök is so evident that the one cannot well be conceived without drawing with it the presence of the other. Thus also, as Grimm concludes, the interpretations of time and space, of world and creation, has been proved.[2] We have dwelt thus long at this

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 350.

[2] *German Mythology*, Part I, p. 825.

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seeming digression because we wish to establish that the Norse system presents a relative dualism only, and this very thing proves it especially ethical: it discusses mainly the present conflict, that this world is of a moral order, and whatever precedes or follows this life is merely hinted at. "The horizon is limited to earthly things: under all circumstances it is better to live than to be dead. After death only fame still lives on: the good name which a man has acquired does not perish with him."[1] If the Norse system had, like the Persian, started with "the primeval twins," it would have been forced to continue the struggle eternally, and we should have to interpret it as a metaphysical presentation of an absolute dualism. Instead of that, it makes Loki only a foster-brother of Odin, and causes both to be destroyed with the rest of the powers involved, because all the agents and factors concerned belong to this present world; and, that being the theme of the whole Norse system, it presents itself as essentially ethical. "An absolute or philosophical dualism . . . . the Norse mythographers certainly did not have in mind."[2]

11. *The dramatical form of this mythological representation.*—There remains to be noticed another feature of the Norse mythology, namely, its dramatic form, by means of which its ethical character is brought out more distinctly. Says Tiele: "The clearest manifestation of the ethical character of this religion is seen in its description of the great drama of the world, which corresponds, both in general and in some detail, with the Persian, and, like its parallel, rests upon ancient nature-myths."[3] We have already seen that the principal theme of the Norse mythology is the struggle of beneficent forces of nature against the injurious, and how this conflict would plainly symbolize to these primitive people the struggle felt to be going on within them. These conceptions would amply supply factors for dramatization. And this tendency would bind the main features and characters of the Norse mythology into a system, Such an effort is evidently at work in the world-drama presented in *Völuspa*, where Ragnarök follows as a necessary poetic justice, that the ethical theme may be distinctly brought out.[4] The history also of this people was of a dramatic character. Chaillu observes that "in those days of incessant warfare, the life of the warriors was a magnificent drama from the beginning to the end. . . . . No other literature that has come down to us from ancient times describes so vividly and minutely as that of the Norse the

[1] SAUSSAYE. *op. cit.*, p. 411.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 336. See also RYDBERG, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 169.

[3] *Outline*, p. 195.

[4] As to the genuineness of *Völuspa*, as presenting the world-drama, in its main features, see V. RYDBERG's scholarly remarks to Drs. Bugge and Bang, in his *Germanisk Mythologi*, Vol. II, pp. 483–628.

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deeds of the grand heroes of old."[1] "The heathen Norse mythology was formed, in accordance with the viking spirit, into an epic drama," says Petersen.[2] And Grundtvig observes that "Iceland was really a refuge organized in despair, if possible to preserve the old Norse power and freedom in all their glory. Hence it might be called a dramatic society on a large scale, for the purpose of calling up the ages of the gods and heathen times from their tragical as well as from their comical side."[3] The emigration from Norway to Iceland in the ninth century was one from principle, like the one to New England. The *udal-bondi* and people of the highest culture then in the North fled from what they considered the tyranny of Harald Haarfager and the oppression of the feudal system which he was attempting to establish in Norway. One of the distinctive features of Norse mythology is, furthermore, that it always represents their gods as belonging to a finite race. And this, as already stated, adapts this mythology to ethical application and interpretation. The gods thus had had their beginning; so, it was reasoned, they must also have an end. Being born of a mixture of divine and gigantic elements, they were imperfect, and hence, like men, doomed to meet their end. "Lacking the idea of eternal duration," says Frazer, "primitive man naturally supposes the gods to be mortal like himself."[4] The whole scheme of the Norse mythology was, therefore, a drama, every step leading gradually to the climax or tragic end, when, with true poetic justice, punishment and reward were impartially meted out. "The death of Baldur, the best and wisest of the Æsir, one of the disasters brought about by Loki, is the great turning-point of the drama, for it proves the mortal nature of the gods."[5] So this incident becomes the central thought in this drama of the gods and of the world, and the punishment of Loki and the twilight of the gods follow as necessary steps. The theogony and theodicy of the Norse people necessarily led the mythographers also to present a theochthony—characteristics that differentiate the Norse mythology from others and confine it within ethical limits. "In Norse mythology alone do we find cosmogonical and eschatological views systematically developed."[6] So Hauch claims that "in the Norse myth-cycle . . . . we find a continuous drama, with a catastrophe already in the beginning of it prepared and necessary."[7] Even Golther extols these eschatological myths as "a fitting climax to the history of Teutonic religion," and avers

[1] *The Viking Age*, Part I, p. 431.
[2] *Norse Mythology*. p. 137.
[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 135.
[4] *Op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 1. See also L. W. King, *Babylonian Religion and Myths*, p. 8.
[5] Tiele, *Outline*, p. 196. See also Frazer, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 345.
[6] Saussaye, *op. cit.*, p. 338.
[7] *Die nordischen Mythenlehre*, p. 165.

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that "no people possesses such a system of cosmological and eschatological dramas."[1] And Saussaye says: "This end of things had long before been announced and prepared by the appearance of the three Norns on Idhavoll,[2] by the war with the Vanir, and by the Æsirs's violation of their oaths[3] . . . . Everything else is brought into connection with this end."[4] And Grundtvig, in the preface to his work, declares: "The Æsir religion unfolds in five acts, the most glorious drama (*sejersdrama*) that any mortal being could produce."[5] Petersen, therefore, pungently remarks: "The North has no drama; it made its very mythology into a drama."[6] And Vicary observes: "There were no acted plays in the saga times amongst the Northmen. Their dramas were real."[7]

12. *The Norns.*—Taking the constitution of the world as it is, without entering into unnecessary metaphysical speculations, but trying to solve the present world-problem, the Northmen would almost appear to us as confirmed fatalists. This much is plain: This fundamental tragic conception, this deep sense of seeming unavoidable fatality, a feeling no doubt to a great extent resulting from the period of migration, has given a peculiar expression to the songs and sagas of this people, and especially to their conception of the Norns. The goddesses of fate they called "Norns" —a word not occurring in any kindred dialect. The three maidens from Jotunheim were no doubt the three Norns "who had been reared among the giants."[8] Tiele differs from this view, adopted from Simrock, and holds that the Norse giantesses were the wives of Loki, Frey, and Njord.[9] This, however, would only complicate Norse mythology unnecessarily.[10] At any rate, they appear to be prior to the gods,[11] who, as well as men, during the whole course of their existence, were to be subjected to them. When these came among the gods, the attention of the gods "became directed to that which should yet come to pass, and their hitherto useless energies acquired a definite object."[12] These Norns resemble the Greek Moiræ, who also belong to an older race of gods,[13] only that the northern picture is more comprehensive. Their functions are to point out or show and to determine. They show or make known what was destined beforehand, and determine what shall take place in time. Hence their ethical char-

[1] *German Mythology*, pp. 501, 543. See also E. H. MEYER, *Völuspa*. 36, 61; *Die eddische Kosmogonie*, 77 ff.; *Germanische Mythologie*, §146.

[2] *Völ.*, 8.

[3] *Ibid.*, 21–26.

[4] *Op. cit.*, pp. 349, 350.

[5] *Op. cit.*, See also SUNDEN, *Nordens Mythologi*, p. 82.

[6] *Nordens Mythologi*, p. 15.

[7] *The Viking Age*, Vol. I, p. 158.

[8] *Völ.*, 8.

[9] *Outline*, p. 197.

[10] See p. 31 of this thesis.

[11] *Völ.*, 8.

[12] THORPE, *Norse Mythology*, p. 145

[13] SAUSSAYE, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

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acter and importance in this system become plain. The self-contradiction between absolute necessity and free will was, no doubt, an unsolved riddle with the Norse people; but this much seems to be brought out quite distinctly in their writings, that, while man was free to act (and these people did assert and highly value their freedom), the consequences of his actions were settled beforehand. Thus the Norse people turned their attention to the practical, and therefore ethical, side of this problem, leaving aside its metaphysical implication. Hence there is manifest, in their character no less than in their writings, a certain resignation to the necessity of things. This is tersely expressed thus: "Then let us leave necessity to rule;" and again: "It is bad to succumb to fate." In another lay we read thus: "Kings cannot conquer fate;" and again: "Fate may not be withstood."[1] "No one can withstand the word of Urdhr [the other Norns were Verdandi and Skuld], even though it be spoken to one's destruction." This Norse expression may be compared with one from *Rigveda:* "Beyond the measure decided by the gods no one lives, even if he had a hundred souls."[2] In the Norse system there is also manifest a very marked distinction between destiny and fortune. The gods might bestow fortune and prosperity on man, but the Norns alone could announce his destiny. So the Völva sings concerning the Norns:

> Laws they established,
> Life allotted,
> To the sons of man;
> Destiny pronounced.[3]

And in one of the lays we read:

> The Norns came,
> Who should the prince's
> Life determine.
> They him decreed
> A prince famed to be,
> And of leaders
> Accounted best.[4]

"As none of the gods," says Grimm, "was at the beginning of creation, but rather sprung out of it, so they can do nothing against a higher constitution of the world. . . . . There is a predestined and necessary character of all that comes into being, and exists, and perishes. Destiny has principally to do with the beginning and the end of human life."[5] So we read:

[1] *S. F.* III., 43; *H. H.* II, 27, 53.
[2] *Fiol.*, 47; *cf. Rigveda*, X, 933.
[3] *Völ.*, 20.
[4] *H. H.* I., 2.
[5] *German Mythology*, Part I, pp. 856–858.

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For one day
Was my age decreed,
And my whole life determined.[1]

And again:

A certain day
Is for thy death decreed.[2]

It is owing to the decrees of the Norns when a man falls in battle,[3] or dies in bed.[4] Hence Saussaye thinks that Norns and Valkyries may be regarded as the same. Perhaps we may say that the latter are the viking conception of the former. This would still further simplify the Norse system.[5] And against the decree of the Norns nothing would avail, not even the merit of valor; for:

The Norns have for us
Guiki's heirs,
A lifetime appointed
At Odin's will (permission);
No one may against fate provide,
Nor, of luck bereft,
In his valor trust.[6]

Even Nature would refuse to frustrate Destiny, as the following verse proves:

To the seashore I went,
Against the Norns I was embittered;
I would cast off their persecution;
Bore and submerged me not
The towering billows;
Up on land I rose,
Because I was to live.[7]

So we should take this life as it really is, for:

To calamities,
All too lasting,
Men and women ever will
Be, while living, born.[8]

But "all evils have their measure."[9] And *Havamal* declares: "No man should know his fate beforehand; so shall he live freest from care."[10] This people took life, not with a feeling of dull and stolid resignation, but with bold and undaunted hearts. Grimm has very aptly called this *sorgen-*

[1] *Skir.*, 13.
[2] *S. F.* I., 25.
[3] *Hamd.*, 29.
[4] *Ynglingasaga*, chap. 52.
[5] *Op. cit.* p. 311; see also p. 29 of this thesis.
[6] *Gum. Sl.*, 11.
[7] *Gudr.*, 13.
[8] *Helrida of Brynhild*, 14.
[9] *Sigr.*, 20.
[10] *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 10.

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freier Fatalismus.[1] So we read (*Hamd.*, 31): "We have gotten good report, though we die today or tomorrow. No man can live over the evening, when the word of the Norns has gone forth."[2] In the same strain is the death-cry of Ragnar Lodbrok, as he lies in the pit full of serpents:

> Ended are life's hours;
> Laughing I shall die.[3]

So that, though there are dark shades in this world-conception, "deepening sometimes into gloomy grandeur or touching sadness," yet we never find it "darkening into the blackness of despair." Life being determined in the constitution of things, things as we meet them (heredity and environment, we would say, in ethnological terminology), it is man's duty to make the best of it, invoking the help of his gods and spurred on by the example of his heroes (a divine-human basis for moral ideals). In the heroic legends "shine, in a setting of poetry, the ideals of the race itself."[4] This makes the drama of life very real and intensely moral.

It will now be proper to present some of the moral precepts worked out through this world-conception.

[1] *DM*, 4, *Vorrede*, XLI.

[2] *C. P. B.*, Part I, p. 59.

[3] *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 345. For further illustration see *Atla*. (*C. P. B.*, Part I, pp. 48 ff.)

[4] GUMMERE, *Germanic Origins*, p. 473. See especially UHLAND, the section entitled "Das Ethische" of his masterly study on the *Heldensage* (Vol. I, pp. 211–347); also the seventh volume of the same work. A more recent work is by W. P. KER, *Epic and Romance*.

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CHAPTER III.

NORSE PRECEPTS, FROM THEIR SONGS AND SAGAS, EXPRESSING THEIR ETHICAL WORLD-CONCEPTION.

1. *The Norse ethical system.*—As the system of the Norse mythology arose without any conscious object to be effected in morals, it did not embrace any actual code of morals in the higher sense of the term. Neither does this system pronounce by positive expressions what is virtue and what is vice; it presupposes a consciousness thereof in its votaries. It therefore represents virtue and vice in general terms—the one bringing its own reward, the other its own punishment. Keyser further remarks: "*Havamal* and *Sigrdrifumal* of the *Elder Edda* constitute a collection of prudential maxims rather than a system of morals. But these maxims, inasmuch as they were thought to proceed from the gods or from superior beings nearly related to the gods, are combined with Asa faith, and express the ideas of a rational and worthy life which were developed among the Northmen under its influence."[1] And Andersen observes that the *Eddas* "may be searched through and through, and there will not be found a single myth, not an impersonation of any kind, that can be considered an outrage upon virtue or a violation of the laws of propriety."[2] As for the trustworthiness of the sagas, from which we also shall produce some wholesome precepts as specimens of the moral ideas of the Norse people, G. W. Dasent says, in the preface to his *The Story of Burnt Njal:* "There can be no doubt that it was considered a grave offense to public morality to tell a saga untruthfully." The following, very sensible, remark is from the Icelandic preface to *Egil's Saga* (Reykjavik, 1856): "We may say the same of this, as of all the best sagas relating to Iceland, that their authors do not tell wilfully untruths. . . . . The same may be said of the superstitions and contradictions which occur in the sagas. They show no wilful purpose to tell untruths, but simply are proofs of the beliefs and turn of thought of men in the age when the sagas were put into writing." S. Laing, in his introductory dissertations to his translation of the *Heimskringla* by Snorre Sturleson, gives a list of not less than one hundred and seventy sagas written in the Norse language. These early reminiscences were preserved by traditional songs and ballads until the time when they

[1] *Nordmændenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendomen*, p. 310.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 113; *cf.* UHLAND, *Literaturblatt für germanische und romanische Philologie*, February, 1891, p. 47.

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were fixed by writing; hence the skalds were "the living books to be referred to in every case of law and property in which the past had to be applied to the present." As registrators of events, they were "a necessary and most important element in the social structure."[1] Heritable interests and rights of families in Iceland were involved in what was going on in the mother-countries, and to return and tell these stories as they had heard them at the courts was the highest honor that the skalds coveted. They also exercised a great moral influence as counselors and personal friends of the chiefs.[2] We will now present some quotations from the Eddic songs and from the sagas, illustrative of the moral conceptions of the Norse people. In the following quotations from the *Elder Edda* (the *Younger Edda* being only a mythological commentary of the *Elder*), as well as in the previous, we have mainly made use of the metrical rendering into English by B. Thorpe, as we find, upon comparison with the original sources, that this sympathetic work reflects more nearly the Norse poetic spirit than any other translation into English. *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, by Vigfusson and Powell, is a more modern effort systematizing old Norse poetry chronologically and somewhat topically; but the work, says Saussaye, should be used with circumspection, as it is, from a philological point of view, far from trustworthy.[3] Its cut-up, shifted, and prosaic rendering is also, for our purpose, less interpretative of Norse conceptions. Our specimens from the sagas are taken from the *Northern Library* and other Norse sources. The *Eddas* and sagas are full of epigrammatic folk-morals that reflect the Norse conception of life. These are gnomic sayings, moral counsels, rather than religious commends, relating to matters which concern the outward circumstances of life, rules of practical conduct, expressed in terse and pointed form. These rules of life may have been variously understood, and with differing earnestness carried out into practice among the Norse people as such. But, on the whole, we find them reflected in the popular character of the Scandinavian peoples, such as history teaches it to us, down to our own times. It is, therefore, of special interest to study these precepts.

2. *Conduct in general.*—Concerning the proper conduct of life we read in *Havamal*, vs. 6:

> Of his understanding
> No one should be proud,
> But rather in conduct cautious.

[1] *Heimskringla*, translated by S. LAING, pp. 50, 51.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 61.

[3] See bibliography to *The Religion of the Teutons*, by DE LA SAUSSAYE (1902).

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And again, vs. 103:

At home let a man be cheerful
And toward a guest liberal,
Of wise conduct he should be,
Of good memory and ready speech;
If much knowledge he desires,
He must often talk on good.

And in *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 4, we read: "Blessed (*sæll*) is he who wins a good report and the favor of men; for it is hard to win over other men's hearts. Blessed is he who in his life enjoys good report and good advice; for many a man has suffered from another's evil counsel." So we are advised in *Havamal*, vs. 119, concerning vice:

A bad man
Let thou never know thy misfortunes,
For from a bad man
Thou never will obtain
A return for thy good will.

And again, vs. 130:

Rejoiced at evil
Be thou never;
But let good give thee pleasure.

And in *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 44: "Beware of evil in all thy ways." The following from *Havamal*, vs. 135, reflects a fair estimate of human character:

Vices and virtues
The sons of mortals bear
In their breasts mingled;
No one is so good
That no failing attends him;
Nor so bad as to be good for nothing.

3. *Courage and wisdom.*—At first one would hardly expect to find such maxims of worldly wisdom as those that meet us in this literature among a people so warlike as the Norse. Tacitus calls the Teutons *gentes periculorum avidas*,[1] "a race that thirsts for dangers." "Valor," says a Teuton warrior in the same history, "is the only proper goods of men. The gods range themselves on the side of the strongest."[2] But war develops cunning as well as courage. So we read in *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 44: "The warrior who is to be the chief among men must needs have the choicest wits and weapons." Wisdom in the sense of prudence, cau-

[1] *Hist.*, V, 19. [2] *Ibid.*, IV, 17.

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tion, based on experience, is what is counseled in *Havamal*, whether it be Odin or some minstrel that speaks. Valor and world-wisdom were thus the twin virtues that were much prized. To prove this further one needs only read in the *Edda* the oft-recurring scoffs at faint-hearted and uneasy fools; while the brave and the wise are always praised. And this behooved freedom's people; for, as Plato has said, "it will never be well with the state until the true philosopher is king, or kings philosophize rightly." With such ideals of character, the Norse people, like the heroes of Homer, "in the excess of their over-boiling courage dared to defy the gods themselves."[1] The Norsemen were men of actions rather than words. In the lays of *Sigurd and Brynhild*, vs. 72, Brynhild advises Gudrun:

Let us cease from angry words,
And not indulge in useless prattle.
Long have I borne in silence
The grief that dwells in my breast.

And in another lay we find this bravado:

Much more seemly, Sinfiotli!
Would it be for you both
In battle to engage,
And the eagles to gladden,
Than with useless words to contend,
However princes may foster hate.[2]

In *Ragnar Lodbrok Saga*, p. 62, Åslog says to Ivar: "Still remember that two things cannot be united: to be called a great man, and yet perform no great deeds." Cowardice and fear were despised. See especially the lay of *Harbard*. In *S. F.* II., vs. 6, we read:

Rarely a man is bold,
When of mature age,
If in childhood he was faint-hearted.

And in vs. 24:

Many a one is bold
Whose sword has never broken
In another's breast.

And again in vs. 31:

For the brave 'tis better
Than for the timid
To join in the game of war;
For the joyous it is better
Than for the sad,
Let come whatever may.

[1] MALLET, *Northern Antiquities*, p. 153.

[2] *H. H.* II., vs. 44.

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"The great of heart," "the noble-born," are expressions often recurring throughout the Norse writings, especially the sagas. Says Gummere: "In war, indeed, of whatever kind, the Germanic virtue of courage came to the front; but in the *comitatus* (retinue) courage was no more prominent than fidelity, loyalty, and truth. The sense of duty, the sense of standing and enduring for a principle, has always been the mainspring of Germanic success."[1] So courage must be coupled with sense, as we read in *Guth.*, vs. 28:

Courage hast thou, Hamdir!
If only thou hadst sense:
That man lacks much
Who wisdom lacks.

In *Sigr.*, vss. 22–37, as also in the *Völsunga Saga*, chap. 21, the conception prevails that not only courage, but also wisdom, behooves the hero.

4. *Truthfulness and sincerity.*—Loyalty and veracity, combined with unconquerable love of liberty, so strong as even to impel them to suicide if treated with indignity, present themselves as further fundamental characteristics of the Norse people. In *Gun. Sl.*, vs. 16, we find this assertion:

Sooner shall Goiu
Pierce me to the heart,
And Nidhögg suck my veins,
Linn and Langback
My liver tear,
Than I will abandon
My steadfastness of heart.

The court poet Eywind says:

True to my dear king have I been,
I play no double part.[2]

To emulate one another in bravery and to be faithful to their chief—these are, according to Tacitus, the highest virtues of the *comitatus* in both peace and war.[3] And *Havamal* declares: "Anything is better than to be false."[4] Brynhild dying exclaims:

Much I have said,
And more would say,
If the sword would grant me
Power of speech.
My voice fails,
My wounds swell:
Truth only I have uttered;
So I will cease.[5]

[1] *Germanic Origins*, p. 261.
[2] *N. L.*, I, p. 35.
[3] *Germania*, chaps. 13, 14.
[4] *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 8.
[5] *S. F.* III., vs. 68.

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Sincerity was cultivated. Hakon the Old says: "Because Gunhild is proved to be a woman full of deceit and treacherous cunning, the mother of the boy puts no faith in her smooth words and fair speech."[1] Hakon says to Gold-Harald: "You cannot begin important enterprises and afterward relinquish them in disgrace."[2] And in *Alv.*, vs. 3, we have this wholesome remark: "'Tis better not to pray than too much offer." According to Uhland, "in both the principal modes of Teutonic life, among those settled in fixed habitations and those who roam in enterprises on land and sea, the main bond of union and the leading virtue is fidelity: in it we discern the power that animates and sustains Teutonic life."[3] And these traits of faithfulness, bravery, etc., that we find in the characters of the sagas are also chief characteristics of the heroic lays in the Norse *Eddas*. So Saxo, IV, 167, gives the Norse this testimony: "the illustrious men of old thought lying most dishonorable." In the period of deep moral degeneracy that precedes the end of the world, according to the Norse drama, perjury is, next to murder, accounted the greatest crime.[4]

5. *Promises and oaths.*—That the Norse people held sacred their private promises and their public oaths, many proofs from their writings can be produced as illustrations. In *Alv.*, vs. 3, we read:

> A promise once confirmed
> Let no one break.

Vows made over the cup are mentioned in *Helg*, vss. 32 and 33. King Swain of Denmark, "before ascending the high-seat of his father, drank to his memory, and made a solemn vow that, before the expiration of three years, he should lead an expedition to England."[5] At the battle of Hiorunga Bay one of the Jomsvikings said to Eric, who asked him if he was willing to accept quarter with him (be subject under him):

> Life will I not accept,
> Unless to perform
> The vow that I made when young.[6]

Hence Earl Hakon could say to his trusted men: "You are tried and honorable men, who will not break the oaths that you swear before me and all these chiefs here assembled."[7] Not even in war were oaths annulled, as we read in *S. F.* III., vs. 17:

> It beseems us not
> So to do,
> By thy sword to break
> Sworn oaths.

[1] *N. L.*, I, p. 51. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 58. [3] *Schriften*, Vol. VII, p. 555. [4] *Völ.*, 26, 30; *Sigr.*, 23. [5] *N. L.*, I, p. 109. [6] *N. L.*, I, p. 122 [7] *Ibid.*, 149.

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Great stress was thus laid upon the sanctity of an oath, which, like a vow, was considered binding. Scarcely any other literature from primitive times points out so plainly and with such marked emphasis again and again the loathing in which oath-breakers were held. Thus we read: "I counsel thee . . . . Swear no oath except it be true. Perjury strikes fearful roots; most wretched is the truce-breaker."[1] Brynhild instigated Gunnar to murder Sigurd, saying that "he had deceived them both, and broken his oath."[2] Hence the complaint:

Sigurd to me
Oaths has sworn,
Oaths sworn,
All falsehoods.
He at a time deceived me
When he should have been
Of all oaths
Most observant.[3]

Even the broken oaths of the Æsirs were punished."[4] And broken promises were sure to be avenged. So Sigrun confesses to Helgi:

Yet, chieftain! I forsee
My kindred's wrath:
I have my father's promise broken.[5]

Rightly Chaillu comments on this Norse characteristic: "History teaches us that the avenging fates have never been slow to smite low to the dust oath-breakers as well as nations which, in a moment of hallucination showing the moral disease of the mind of their people, have absolved the men who had committed this crime."[6]

6. *Friendship and fosterbrotherhood.*—Concerning friendship *Havamal* advises: "A man should be a friend to his friend, to himself and his friend."[7] And again: "He is no friend who only speaks to please."[8] Loddfafnir advises: "I counsel thee. . . . Be not thou the first to break off with thy friend. Sorrow will eat thy heart, if thou lackest a friend to open thy heart to."[9] Atli says:

Let us together bargain,
That is the part of friendship.[10]

"Perhaps the most beautiful, touching, and unselfish trait in the character of men of which we have any record," says Chaillu, "is the ancient

[1] *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 42.
[2] *Brynhild and Sigurd*, vs. 73.
[3] *Ibid.* vs. 2.
[4] *Völ.*, vss. 21–26.
[5] *H. H.* II., 14.
[6] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 553.
[7] *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 12.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[10] *Helg.*, 3.

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custom of fosterbrotherhood which prevailed among the earlier Norse tribes."[1] There is an indication of this already in *Havamal:* "He that opens all his heart to another mixes blood with him."[2] Eric says to Astrid, the mother of King Olaf Tryggvason, concerning Hakon the Old: "We were associated together as vikings for a long time in the very closest fellowship; we had one purse between us, and I found him most faithful in all things."[3] To break such close friendship was considered a grave offense. King Harald confesses: "It will be reckoned in me an evil deed to betray my foster-brother."[4]

7. *Vengeance and the award of justice.—Völundarkvida* presents the principle of vengeance as expressed and carried out in those unsettled times. Of Völund imprisoned we read, vs. 18:

> He sat and never slept,
> And his hammer plied:
> But much more speedy vengeance
> Devised on Nidud.

"Holmgård," says the historian of King Olaf Tryggvason, "was a sanctuary so inviolable that whoever therein slew a man, not sentenced to death, should himself be slain, and now the whole people, in defense of their laws and customs, pressed forward in search of Olaf, intending to take him wherever he should be found and put him to death, as their laws required."[5] Although King Olaf had promised a good reward to whosoever would find the wicked Hakon, he meted out severe punishment to the thrall Krak, who, betraying his master, had beheaded him and then came to Olaf with his trophy. In stern tone Olaf addressed him: "I will . . . . let you have a fit reward for your labor and so deter those who come after us from betraying their liege-lords. Though you were the servant of a wicked man, he was nevertheless your master, and you ought to have done him faithful service, and refrained from betraying him, no less than if he had been a good lord." This thrall was then beheaded, and his head, together with that of his master which he had brought, Olaf caused to be nailed on a gallow on the island of Nidarholm, "which was used in those days as a place of execution for thieves and evil-doers."[6] Says Chaillu: "Nothing could show more plainly that, apart from the profession of vikingry, the people carried on their commercial transactions in a very honorable way, than the fact that the laws on debt were very stringent, and that robbery, arson, adulteration of food, etc., were punished most severely, and in some cases put the offender outside

[1] *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 61.
[2] *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 7.
[3] *N. L.*, I, p. 49.
[4] *Ibid.*, I, p. 59.
[5] *Ibid.*, I, p. 56.
[6] *Ibid.*, I, p. 147.

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the pale of the law."[1] Nor was there any regard for person in meting out punishment. Says Earl Einar:

> Many a fine-bearded man
> For stealing sheep is outlawed.[2]

And Gudrun confesses:

> Now I must myself
> Purify from crime.[3]

But Chaillu also calls attention to the fact that "the laws did not aspire to improve the moral condition of the criminal and try to make him a better man, except through fear of punishment; their object in early days was to prevent private revenge, and stop people taking matters into their own hands."[4] In *Heimskringla* we find that another kind of propitiation was in later times resorted to. Offenses and crimes were settled for by fines, and the offender was an outlaw until he or his friends had settled with the offended or his kin, and the king. But the friends of the murdered, for instance, could refuse this compensation, and wait for an opportunity of revenge. Not to avenge an injury received and not compensated for was considered highly dishonorable. In the *Njalasaga* old Njal is told that he too, as well as his wife, may leave the burning house, where his sons have been surrounded by their enemies. "No," he answers, "I am an old man, unable to avenge my sons, and I will not live in disgrace." "What strikes us in all these characters" (in the saga times), says Saussaye, "is their perfect assurance and firmness as regards duty and right. They lived in an age of tumult in which all bonds seemed to be severed. . . . . And yet in all this uncertainty no state of moral anarchy prevails. Men know what to do: their duty lies before them, clear and simple, and the moral order is not subverted."[5]

8. *Arbitration.*—It is perhaps a pleasant discovery, and indeed but a just concession to the openness of the moral character of this people, to point out that in those days of primitive jurisprudence and incessant warfare, first between tribes, then between sea-kings, the modern principle of arbitration was sometimes resorted to. Thus we read that, at a certain juncture, "friends of both sides came forward and proposed terms of peace between Eric's sons and Earl Hakon, and thus it came to pass, through the entreaties of honorable men, that a reconciliation was effected."[6] And King Olaf Tryggvason says concerning King Harald and Earl Einar that, "through the mediation of well-disposed persons, peace was made

[1] *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 235.
[2] *N. L.*, I, p. 133.
[3] *Guth.* III. 8.
[4] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 579.
[5] *Op. cit.*, p. 406.
[6] *N. L.*, I, p. 39.

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between them."[1] The background of this disposition is, as was indicated, their openness to moral convictions. Such a trait of character, to hold back rage and treat the situation with fairness, is related of King Harald. He "had formed a habit that, whenever rage or anger suddenly possessed him, he would first calm himself and let his anger pass away, and afterward look tranquilly into affairs."[2] Helgi says to his own father:

Hiorward, thou art not
A king of wholesome counsel,
Leader of people!
Renowned though thou mayest be.
Thou hast let fire devour
The homes of princes,
Though harm to thee
They none have done.[3]

Earl Hakon says to King Harald of Denmark concerning Gold-Harald: "To slay him, your kinsman, would be a monstrous crime, for he will unanimously be regarded as guiltless so far as things have gone."[4] These Norsemen were not the ferocious barbarians and merciless sea-rovers that the Saxon monks make them out to be.[5] Hence the poet in *Sol.*, vs. 30, could sing:

No one stands in dread,
If he does no evil:
Good it is to be blameless.

But "danger is everywhere for the doomed one."[6] And of a last righteous judgment we read already in *Havamal*, vs. 77:

I know one thing
That never dies:
Judgment over dead man.

For a full discussion of this passage—how it refers to a last righteous judgment, and not simply to judgment passed by posterity, or as to the keeping of a person's good name in memory, or *vice versa*—see Rydberg.[7]

9. *Domestic life.*—In the social life of the Norse people the first thing that strikes us, as regards outward matters, is their sense of a divine vocation to till the earth. In this respect this people again may be compared with another people, also to a high degree ethically inclined, namely, the Persians. It would be interesting to find other parallels, and thus perhaps

[1] *N. L.*, I, p. 135.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[3] *Helg.*, 10.
[4] *N. L.*, I, p. 58.
[5] See S. Laing, *Heimskringla*, pp. 48, 49.
[6] *Fal.* II., 6.
[7] *German Mythology*, Vol. I, pp. 370–81.

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demonstrate to what extent such an environment and mode of living is conducive to the development of ethical conceptions and of a moral character with a people, quite apart from a consideration of its individual, national, or racial traits and relations. Instead of this plain and honest home industry, our day has to do with the modern factory and city life, with its complications and temptations. At any rate, we find abundant traces among the Norse people of a healthy moral atmosphere, as long as they staid home and minded their own business. The motto of Harald's son, Olaf the Peaceful, read thus:

> I like the farmers best,
> Tilled land and standing peace.[1]

In Njalasaga we are told that the chiefs laid aside their capes and sowed corn themselves. King as well as *bondi*, as someone has said, "fought hard, worked hard, lived hard, and died hard." Björn Atterboil, one of these free *udal-bondi*—not a European peasant, but an American farmer, as the term in Scandinavia still denotes—says: "All vagrants are loathsome to me."[2] And to this day a beggar is rare among the descendants of this thrifty people. The best possible feeling and parental confidence existed between those of the family and those in the household at large. Scarce do we find any record of ill-treatment. Chaillu observes that, "though serfdom, a modified form of slavery, existed in other parts of Europe, the land of the Swedes, Gautar, and Norwegians was never degraded by it; but, alas, it took root in Denmark and showed there to what a miserable condition a free people can be gradually brought by not watching over their liberties."[3] The system of settlement pursued in the Scandinavian peninsula and in Iceland was *udal* instead of, as in other parts of Europe, "feudal;" that is, an occupation of the land, not by sword, but by spade. On account of physical environment and social arrangements, there was among the Norse people neither room nor heart for a nobility or a serfdom. The thralls or prisoners of war could barely produce their own sustenance, and left no surplus gain for a master's luxury; hence they were attached to the estate and dependent on it as children of the household, and so treated.[4] The nobility of Sweden (Norway and Iceland never had any) is a modern institution, and, because foreign in every sense of the word, is now existing only in a few hereditary names. There was an indigenous freedom with this people and a parental care that speak highly of the moral atmosphere of their *udal* homes. In *Grou.*, vs. 6, Groa advises her son:

[1] *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 366.
[2] *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 504.
[3] *N. L.*, I, p. 49.
[4] See, further, S. Laing, *op. cit.*, pp. 111, 112.

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From thy shoulders
Thou shouldst cast
What to thee seems irksome:
Let thyself thyself direct.

And again, vs. 16:

My son! bear hence
Thy mother's words,
And in thy breast let them dwell,
For happiness abundant
Shalt thou have in life,
While of my words thou art mindful.

Concerning the advice of experience and old age we read: "I counsel thee. . . . Never laugh at a hoary sage: old men's sayings are often good; discreet words come out of a shriveled skin."[1] Of their carefulness in founding happy homes Vicary adduces a plain illustration: "Young men," he says, "did sometimes select their own wives, but their parents usually did so for them. Thus Njal [in *Njalasaga*] said to his son Helgi that he had thought of a wife for him. Helgi at once consented, as having faith in his father's judgment."[2] Hence to this day these people think a great deal of their free homes. In *Hymd.*, vs. 10, we read:

A duty 'tis to act
So that the young prince
His paternal heritage may have
After his kindred.

And this touching tribute to home and heritage is quite in consonance with the views in *Havamal*; for thus we read: "One's home is the best, though it be but a cottage. A man is a man in his own house. His heart bleeds who must beg for every meal."[3] With such reverence for parents and love for home and independence inculcated and practiced, the Norse people indeed felt what Homer expressed in the ninth century B. C.: "Whatever day makes man a slave takes half his worth away." While *Grot.* is an irony on avarice, it also illustrates the above thought, as the following proves (vs. 8):

Thou wast not, Frodi!
For thyself overwise,
When thralls thou boughtest;
For strength thou boughtest them
And for their looks,
But of their race
Didst not inquire.

[1] *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 19. [2] *Saga Times*, p. 106. [3] *C. P. B.*, Vol. I, p. 5.

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Hence they entertained pity for this unfortunate class in society, as we read in *Atla.*, vs. 60:

> Few so act
> As for a slave to intercede,
> That he may escape;

and in *Faf.*, vs. 7:

> 'Tis said, slaves ever tremble.

10. *Love and chastity.*—Upon these two pillars of human happiness rested their domestic life and enjoyment, their social bonds and strength. Says *Fiol*, vs. 49:

> A sight unlooked for
> Gladdens most persons,
> When one the other loves.

"There are," says Chaillu, "several beautiful examples in Norse literature showing how strong were the affections in the hearts of the people, even among the bravest warriors."[1] He, no doubt, has reference to the knightly affection coupled with proper regard, even reverence, for women and home, so characteristic of the Teutonic peoples, reference to which so often recurs in the songs and sagas of the Norse people, of which the beautiful *R. L. Saga* is a classical example. But this people was not given to sentimentality, for, as Kålund remarks: "Love before marriage is as rare as fidelity after marriage is general."[2] In *S. F.* I., vs. 23, we find this remarkable passage:

> She to herself of body
> Was of no sin conscious.

And the innocent shepherd girl, Kraka, says to the knightly Ragnar:

> Free from spots thou leave me,
> If peace thou wilt establish;
> A woman may go as she came,
> When a king she has visited.[3]

Having fulfilled her condition, to show his worth by some knightly deeds, he won her at last as a bride. According to *Har.*, vs. 18, the ideal Norse woman was "sprightly but meek, shrewd but kind." Tacitus says that "they saw something divine in woman, and her judgments were accepted as oracles."[4] The epithets *turpi* ("shameful") and *infame* ("infamous") applied to treason, faithlessness, base crimes, unnatural vices, etc., used by Tacitus, cannot but testify to the purity of ancient Teutonic morals. The sexual purity of the Teutons is depicted by Tacitus in his *Germania*

[1] *Op. cit.*, Part II, p. 414.

[2] *P. G²*., III, p. 421, *Sitte*, by K. KÅLUND.

[3] *R. L.*, p. 20, by GOEDECKE.

[4] *Germ.*, paragraphs 2, 4, 5, 7–9.

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in colors carefully chosen to bring out the contrast with the moral corruption of Rome. But with this characterization corresponds a testimony from another source. A French educator to Christian VII. of Denmark says: "When the people of the North migrated into the southern parts of Europe, they carried along with their laws a chastity and reserve which excited universal surprise."[1] And we may add another vivid acknowledgment from a quarter quite unexpected. Salvian, a priest of Marseilles, in the fifth century, exclaims: "Let us blush and be covered with a confusion which ought to produce salutary effects. Wherever the Goths become masters we see no longer any disorders except among the old inhabitants [this meaning, evidently, those foreign residents under Rome among whom this Teutonic tribe settled]. Our manners are reformed under the dominion of Vandals (barbarians). Behold an incredible event! Barbarians have, by the severity of their discipline, rendered chaste the Romans themselves; and the Goths have purified those places which the others defiled by their debaucheries. A cruel (warlike) nation, but worthy to be admired for their continence."[2] To the same effect are the following remarks by Bradley, in his splendid book on the Goths: "There are," he says, "instances on record in which Romans were glad to seek under the milder sway of the Goths a refuge from the oppression of their own rulers. . . . . The Roman clergy, by whom the Goths were disliked as alien conquerors and as heretics, were often constrained to own that these barbarians obeyed the precepts of the gospel far better than did their own countrymen."[3] Chaillu rightly observes: "A retrograde movement in regard to the rights and standing of women took place after the extinction of the Asa creed."[4] To the Norse documents we return again, to complete further the picture of moral men and women in those days of primitive vitality. In the instructions to Thorvald and Gudrun we find that it was the law that if a woman dressed as a man or a man as a woman it was reasonable ground for divorce.[5] In *Sigr.*, vs. 28, we read these wholesome admonitions:

> I counsel thee. . . . .
> Though thou seest fair brides on the bench,
> Let them not hinder thy sleep.
> Do not allure women to kisses.

[1] MALLET, *Northern Antiquities*, p. 205.

[2] SALVIAN, *De Gubern. Dei*, Lib. VII.

[3] H. BRADLEY, *The Goths*, pp. 11, 12.

[4] *Op. cit.*, Part II, p. 1.

[5] VICARY, *Saga Times*, p. 110.

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And again, vs. 32:

This I counsel thee. . . . .
That thou guard thee against evil,
And eschew deceit.
Entice no maiden,
Nor wife of man,
Nor to wantonness incite.

There was thus with the Norse people the same moral restrictions for man as for woman, as we read in *Guth.* III., vs. 3:

With me and Thiodrek
Nothing has passed,
Which to man and wife only belongs.

Chiefs were required to lead pure lives as well as their people, and the wholesome admonitions were clinched by appealing to the individual's personal integrity and honor. Thus we read in *S. F.* I., vs. 23:

Not with vices will
Thy life be sullied;
Let that, noble prince,
In thy mind be borne.

And again, vs. 41:

Thou wilt repose, leader of hosts!
Pure with the maiden,
As she thy mother were;
Therefore, exalted lord of men,
While the world endures
Thy name will be.

Nor was unchastity tolerated by this people any more in high places than in low. So the Norse historian stigmatizes the character of Earl Hakon when he says: "As he advanced in years, his evil conduct toward women increased."[1] And farther on he notes the displeasure of his subjects: "His wicked and shameful deeds have been so unexampled that endurance of them is not possible; his dishonorable conduct is hated by all."[2]

11. *Over-indulgence in eating and drinking.*—The Norse people have often been harshly judged for their drinking-bouts and feasting, with the often consequent fighting moods. In their writings, however—which, as we take it, reflect the conceptions of the time—they condemn both drunkenness and gluttony as moral degradation and unbecoming a people with "good understanding." *Havamal*, which holds that "there is no better guest than great common-sense," comments thus: "A worse provision

[1] *N. L.*, I, p. 126. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

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no man can take from table than too much beer-bibbing: for the more he drinks, the less control he has of his own mind."[1] And *Sigr.* advises: "I counsel thee. . . . . Though there be high words bandied at banquet, never quarrel with drunken men: wine is a great wit-stealer. Revelings and ale have often brought men grief of heart, death to some, to some curses. Manifold are the evils of men."[2] That the Norse people also were in the habit of exercising self-restraint we may infer of the following quotation from *Atla. Gr.*, vs. 8:

> Many horns passed around,
> Until it seemed
> They had full drunken.

And also of the following, from *Havamal*, with its ironical warning: "Let the cup go round, yet drink thy share of mead; speak fair or not at all. No one can blame thee for ill-breeding, though thou go early to sleep. A glutton, unless he has his senses about him, eats himself into lifelong misery. The fool's belly makes him a laughing-stock in company of gentle-folk. The flocks know their time of folding, and leave their pasture: but a fool never knows the measure of his own belly."[3]

12. *Sound view of life.*—The Norse people had almost an optimistic view of life, in spite of all the evils they felt present therein. And this fully accords with the ethical conception of striving for an ideal. In ethicizing this struggle, they held that life was really worth living. *Hav.*, vs. 70, says:

> 'Tis better to live,
> Even to live miserably.

And in *Oddr.*, vs. 34, we read:

> Each one lives
> As best he may.

And again, *Havamal* observes: "No sorrow is worse to a man than to be able to enjoy nothing. Fire is the goodliest thing the sons of men can have, and the sight of the sun, the enjoyment of good health, and a guileless life. A man is not utterly wretched, though he have ill health; some men are blessed with sons, some with kindred, some with wealth, some with good deeds. Better be quick than dead. A live man may always get a cow." This, indeed, bespeaks a healthy and contented conception of life: to take it as it really is, be satisfied with it, and make the most of it. Above all, we should remember that "chattels die; kinsman pass away; one dies oneself; but good report never dies from the man that

[1] *C. P. B.*, I, pp. 4, 13. [2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 43. [3] *Ibid.* I p. 4.

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gained it." It should also be borne in mind that "many are befooled by riches: one is wealthy, another needy, never blame a man for that." So the sons of this freeborn people were taught: "A king's son [rather, "the noble-born"] should be silent and thoughtful, and daring in battle; cheery and blithe everyone should be, till his death-day come." And again: "Middling wise should every man be, never over-wise. Those who know many things fairly lead the happiest life."[1] Olaf Tryggvason seemed to hear a voice in a dream say to him: "Thou hast in thee the promise of a righteous man." The Norse people had a strong affection for home and country, as we have indicated. When Olaf's first wife had died on one of his viking trips, it is related that "in his great sorrow he would naturally seek first the spot where he had dwelt the longest and lived the happiest."[2] There was always something noble in their conception of freedom and independence. In *Skir.*, vs. 23, we meet with this bold expression:

Suffer compulsion
Will I never.

In the lay of the *Völsungs*, Sigrfrid says to Fafnir: "I am no bondsman, though being captive."[3] This noble-mindedness came especially to prominence when some of their leaders tried to exert undue power, particularly in introducing Christianity. Yeoman (*udal-bondi*) Asbjörn thus addresses King Hakon in the assembly: "We know not if we have received freedom at your hands, or if your wish is not rather to enthral us anew, though in a strange manner. For you wish us to abandon the faith that our fathers held before us from the olden time . . . . to the present . . . . , although that faith has done well for us, and our fathers were much more honorable men than we are." King Harald of Denmark said to Emperor Otto: "I will not give up my faith, unless you show by manifest signs which cannot be disavowed that your faith is better and truer than ours." And King Valdemar says: "My mind tells me that it scarcely fits with my simplicity to throw off the faith which my kinsmen and ancestors from immemorial times held, one after the other, all their days." When King Olaf Tryggvason wished to Christianize Norway by force, the chiefs answered: "We will resist you with all our might, and let those win the day to whom fate assigns the victory."[4]

[1] *C. P. B.*, I, pp. 7, 8, 10.
[2] *N. L.*, I, pp. 92, 94.
[3] *C. P. B.*, I, p. 35.
[4] *N. L.*, I, pp. 24, 88, 95, 203.

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CHAPTER IV.

CONCLUSION.

1. *The Norse system.*—It has, no doubt, been noticed that we have used the expression "system" about the Norse belief, as also of other primitive faiths referred to. By this term we would not, however, be understood to imply to represent these primitive beliefs as in any way systematically arranged in a modern sense, nor would we leave even the impression that this system was a logically thought out and philosophically promulgated world-conception. We simply use these terms, "system" and "world-conception"—for want of better, and as freed from their modern implications—to express that to the Norse mind, among the people and its thinkers, there was in reality something of a connected whole which they entertained of a sphere of ideas and ideals, which, at least from a practical point of view, in a way satisfactory to their state of mind, would offer an explanation of the world-problems as they met with them and tried to solve them.[1] While, with Thorpe, we hold that "this old religion of the North is in fact neither a collection of absurdities and insipid falsehoods nor a fountain of exalted wisdom," yet we would also, with the same author, emphasize that this system contains "ideas of an uncultured people, with reference to the relation between the divine (the morally binding) and the worldly, expressed in images intelligent to the infant understanding."[2] Of the origin of the Eddic songs *C. P. B.* (Introduction, p. 56), says: "Three facts are certain: they are originally composed in a Scandinavian tongue, they were composed for popular entertainment, and they cannot date earlier than the ninth century," that is, as published. The authors of *C. P. B.* further find (Introduction, p. 97) that these songs are in fact accretions: "an inspired beginning is made by one man of genius, and accepted by all hearers; his work, as it passes from hand to hand, gathers bulk" from contributors, commentators, copyists, and glossators. So Grundtvig advises the student to "tear off the title-page and even the binding, that the bare verses in the *Eddas* may stand forth as flocking together, like birds, from various times and places of Norse life. Get at the spirit, and care nothing for even the

[1] We would not, therefore, follow P. Asmus, *Die indogermanische Religion in den Hauptpunkten ihrer Entwickelung*, nor E. von Hartmann, *Das religiöse Bewusstsein der Menschheit im Stufengang seiner Entwickelung*, in their overrating of this system.

[2] *Norse Mythology*, p. 119.

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redactor, for no one such can be proven ever to have existed." And these hymns, he holds, "are the war-songs of the migrating Goths, ... clearly originating from human life as it recurs on earth."[1] And this is the very reason why we can claim them to be expressive of the view of life among the Norse people as such. Carlyle's vivid description is to the same effect: "All this of the old Norse belief," he says, "which is flung out for us in one level of distance in the *Eddas*, like a picture painted on the same canvas, does not at all stand so in reality. It stands rather at all manner of distances of depths, of successive generations, since belief first began. All the Scandinavian thinkers, since the first of them, contributed to that Scandinavian system of thought; in every new elaboration and addition it is the combined work of them all."[2]

2. *Analogies to the Norse system.*—In claiming that the Norse system is predominantly ethical, we would not assert that this system is the only one with this characteristic, nor that it is more ethical than possibly others, as, for instance, the Persian, already referred to. We would simply have demonstrated that the antithetical conceptions of the Norse mythology lend it especially to ethical applications, and that the precepts in the *Eddas* and the general moral tone of the sagas were therefore natural developments, so that the whole sphere of ideas expressing the Norse view of the world and of life proves this system ethical to the very core, the whole being a natural consequence of the character of the Norse people, their endowments and their environments. This ethical mood is at least one characteristic of the Norse people, whatever else may characterize them. But there are also elucidating analogies to the Norse system, and these analogies will be found in those systems of world-views which have in their mythology developed an antithetical conception of the powers of nature. In the words of Wundt: "The development of antithetical moral conceptions within the nature-religions took place most easily and naturally where the myth itself, in its primitive stage, had developed the antithesis between benevolent and malevolent powers."[3] Of this antithesis S. Johnson, in his book on *Oriental Religions*, says: "As a recognition of the strife of contrary forces in the physical and moral spheres, dualism may well be called a universal experience. . . . . It forces man to realize that supreme meaning which he attaches to the moral good, which in the last analysis means that which is conformable to the truth of his being and commands his love and service. . . . . Dualism is in nature, in man; good and evil, both in the physical and ethical spheres, cannot be ignored. Their conflicts is a tremendous reality. . . . . Behind the conflict of good

[1] *Nordisk Mythologi*, pp. 141, 151, 171. [2] *Heroes*, Lecture I. [3] *Ethics*, Part I, p. 112.

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and evil wills, whether human or divine—the antagonism of purpose by which character is formed and virtue enthroned over sorrow and sin—there is, in the nature of things, a law that evil is the condition of good, that without the lower the higher could not be." After having found a proof of this in his examination of Zoroastrianism, Johnson therefore concludes his masterly work with the remark that such a conception educates man "to accept these inevitable conditions of existence, whether seemingly good or bad, as the best for him, because they lift him into the higher morality of free obedience."[1] And this, as we have already seen, was the very disposition in which we found the Norse people as well, confirming the correctness of our interpretation of the Norse world-conception.

3. *The Persian system such an analogy.*—As the nearest system, then, analogous to the Norse system in conceiving and ethicizing this antithesis, we especially notice the Persian world-view.[2] The Persian like the Norse people belong to what ethnologists term the Aryan race. "The response of nature to the contradictions in human experience," says Johnson, "the Aryan conceived the more intensely by reason of his peculiar endowments of clear thought and energetic will, comparatively free from those violent emotions which in the Semitic races tended to blur moral outlines." The Aryan race, this author further observes, "saw in the Titanic antithesis on which the universe revolves the life and death of character;" because "the very order of the elements, by which the contrasts are naturally sustained and completed, became the constant reflection of a positive rent in the moral being of man. . . . . To have impregnated nature with this personal strife of good and evil for the soul of man testifies to a development of moral consciousness which could only have resulted from permanent conditions of resistance."[3] This characterization of the Aryan race in general applies, according to Johnson, with special emphasis and meaning to the Persian people of that race. But the same may also be said of the Teutonic people of the same race, and, as we have already noticed, more particularly of its northern branch, which has left enough literary monuments by which to form an idea of their world-view. Among both of these peoples, the Norse and the Persian, we find the "conditions of resistance" favorable to the development of an ethical world-conception. This antagonistic element, as Johnson (p. 42) observes, "though by no means lacking in Hindoo life, was yet but secondary and left the moral

[1] S. Johnson, *Oriental Religions;* Vol. III, "The Persians," pp. 104, 498.

[2] See V. Rydberg, *Germanisk Mythologi*, Vol. II, p. 182, as to the ethical tendency found in the world-conception of these two peoples.

[3] *Op. cit.*, pp. 41–44.

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interpretation of nature to a higher caste." The Hindoo system, therefore, in its moral aspect never entered into the everyday life of the people as those of the Norse and the Persian. These peoples did not build up that terrible dualism with the speculative intellect. It is the articulate voice of the moral alternative, passing judgment upon the world and upon life, as these are met with. The essential conceptions in the *Edda* and the *Avesta* are therefore the same. They both recognize the evil in the world, physical and moral, as real, and teach the duty of every individual of fighting against it. They avoid the pantheistic indifference of Brahmanism and the absence of enthusiasm in the system of Buddha, by the doctrine of a present conflict between the powers of good and evil. This gives dignity and earnestness to both systems. By fully admitting the freedom of man, they make the sense of responsibility possible, and so purify and feed morality at its roots. Thus Tiele remarks that in doctrine the Teutonic religion, of which we have the best specimen in the Norse, "most resembles the Persian, and, like the Persian, it is inferior in philosophic contemplation to the Vedic religion, though it equally surpasses it in its moral standard."[1] This idea of being a soldier enlisted in the army of light affords one of the strongest practical inducements to hate what is evil and cleave to what is good. It becomes a personal concern, a social necessity, with which all nature is in accord, for all life is battle with moral and physical evil. Courage is therefore the chief virtue in these systems. Hence the point of Loki's crushing remark in *Lok.*, vs. 60, to Thor, the symbol of Norse strength: "Never speak to man about thy eastern journeys, since thou, the hero, didst crouch in a glove-thumb, remembering not that thou wast Thor." Notice also the expression in *Helg.*: "The fiercest king I ever saw, his trunk fought on when his head was off."[2] Everybody was enlisted in the honorable struggle for the right and the good. In the Egyptian system, as in the later teachings of India and of Greece and Rome, the timid only worshiped the deadly and destructive powers of nature, and the bolder alone were privileged to approach to the good gods.[3] We have in this thesis indicated wherein the Norse and the Persian systems differ: the latter teaches an absolute dualism, by virtue of which it partakes of a metaphysical and religious character, while the former presents only a relative dualism, confining itself, at least in the original form of this system, to the conflict in time.

[1] *Outline*, p. 189.

[2] *C. P. B.*, I, pp. 246, 247. For expressions of the Persian conception of conflict we would refer to the *Gathas* in general, and more specifically 29:2, 4, 6; 28:2, 3, 5; 31:12, 13, 8; 44:6, and similar passages.

[3] See V. Rydberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 171.

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4. *Other analogies.*—Tiele observes: "No nation of this [the Indo-European] race has realized this dualism [the conflict in nature and in life] with such clearness as the Letto-Slavs, the Teutons, and the Persians; but while with the first it remained purely physical, the two latter alone, and certainly independently of each other, gave it an ethical character, and wrought it, as it were, into a sublime drama."[1] As an example of the Letto-Slav dualistic conceptions we may instance that the Erzjanes, a tribe of the Mordvinnians, a Finno-Ugrian nation, teach a kind of dualism similar to the Norse and the Persian.[2] This may be a resultant conception from Christian influences, whether by borrowings or interpolations, or both. Nevertheless, it has answered their cravings for a solution in some way of the world-problems, as they appeared to this people. There will, no doubt, be found many such cases where a people or tribe has been, even outside of any marked foreign influences, especially in the earlier formations of beliefs among such peoples. Such cases must then be explained on the principle of "parallel developments of beliefs under similar conditions."[3] Even in modern society, and that, according to what some of its advocates claim, quite apart from Christian influences, at least in their religious bearing, conceptions analogous to the Norse may be observed. For it is quite apparent to any student of ethical and social problems that the identification, or rather putting into relation, of moral and physical evil is fast becoming a leading idea in modern civilization. Our most earnest philanthropists and zealous workers in the fields of sin and misery in crowded cities are coming more and more every day to the conviction that an improvement in the physical conditions of life is the first indispensable condition of moral and religious character. Brentano, in his lecture "On the Natural Sanction for Law and Morality," holds that the best, or the province of highest practical good, embraces everything which is subject to our rational operation, in so far as good can be realized in such matter—self, family, town, state, present world, even distant future times, according to the principle of the summation of the good. Toward the close of the lecture (p. 42) he remarks that, while the pre-ethical times were a night, "we still see the light struggling with the power of darkness. . . . . Ethical motives, in private as in public life, are still far from being everywhere the determining standard. These forces prove themselves still too little developed to hold together the structure of the world, and so nature keeps the machinery going by hunger and love, and by all those other dark strivings which may be developed from self-seeking desires."

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 189.

[2] See *Journal de Société Finno-Ougrienne*, Vol. V.

[3] For further reference see R. I. Dodge, *Our Wild Indians*, p. 112.

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5. *The Christian influences.*—We shall not attempt, in regard to the much-mooted question of the Christian influences, felt in certain parts of the Norse system, to dwell upon the probability that the Jews may have during their captivity received influences from the Persian dualism, and, by so doing, may have emphasized their own moral conceptions. It may be found that for this very reason, when these conceptions in their Christian coloring struck the northern branch of the Aryan stock—a people, as we have seen, with a similar ethical world-conception to that of the Persians—they attached themselves to the Norse equally naturally as they had been centuries before modified by the eastern sister-branch.[1] The following remarks by Saussaye are also worthy of notice: "Christianity was not preached to the Norsemen as a new moral ideal; hence the continuous, unbroken character of the history of the Scandinavian peoples. The Christianization did not usher in a new period. Not until after the lapse of a great number of years did it become evident that Christianity was a leaven in the moral life of the human race."[2] The *Edda* as a whole cannot be proved to have been borrowed from without, for all its names and many of its conceptions are Teutonic, and in the majority of cases Norse, with an original internal coherence and a true national stamp. As Thorpe comments: "Everyone who reads the *Eddas* will at once perceive that the concord which exists between their several parts, notwithstanding that they are but fragments, the grandeur and poetic beauty, of which they in so many instances bear the impress, together with the old tongue in which the songs are composed, could not have been produced by ignorant monks."[3] That there are elements in these primitive traditions and their subsequent developments which remind us of and border on Semitic or later Christian teachings cannot be explained by supposed borrowings from Christianity, which did not extend to the Scandinavian countries until the tenth century, or about two hundred years after the Icelandic migration. "To assail the genuineness of Norse mythology," says Grimm, "is as much as to cast doubt on the genuineness and independence of the Norse language." And farther on he adds: "All criticism cripples and annihilates itself that sets out with denying or doubting what is treasured up in song and story born alive and propagated amongst an entire people, and which lies before our eyes; criticism can but collect and arrange it, and unfold the materials in their historical sequence."[4] Stephen, following the arguments of Müllenhoff, in his answer to Bugge (p. 17), says: "It must have taken a thousand years first to have formed

[1] See V. Rydberg, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 177.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 414.

[3] *Norse Mythology*, p. 119.

[4] *Deutsche Mythologie*, Vol. I, pp. 10, 98.

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such mythic cycles of song and saga, and for these to have spread abroad and sunk down into the dialects and tribal settlements."[1] While no scientific student, pursuing historical methods, will claim that Norse mythology is entirely free from borrowings and intermixtures, we should not, with Professor Bugge, commit the mistake of excluding survivals and parallels, nor make the Norse system so impossibly modern.[2] Nor is it even necessary, with Golther, *Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie*—who, by the way, is very unjust both to Grimm and to Müllenhoff—to be so sparing of the Norse mythology. While he does admit the genuineness of the nucleus of Norse myths, he still reduces it to an insignificant minimum. Grundtvig rises in his Norse strength and fairness, and expostulates that if such an unreasonable miracle ever could have occurred, that one or two monks during the Middle Ages would have originated, or even only reduced to writing, the entire Norse cycle, its songs and sagas would nevertheless be jewels and works of art prompted by the Norse spirit, provided they would express the Norse conception of life, true poetically and historically. And we would add: The main thing, after all, for humanity at large, even for the scholar, in his ex-scholastic moments, is the mental and moral sustainment and uplift these lays and stories afford to universal human life in its struggles onward and upward.

6. *The influences of the Norse system itself.*—Says Chaillu: "The people looked to their poets to perpetuate in songs and transmit to future generations the deeds of their heroes and the fame which was to cling to their names when they had gone to Valhala. From these poets, or skalds, we learn all we know of the history of the earlier northern tribes . . . . without these the history and the deeds of the race must have been lost to us, and we would only have left the antiquities of the early times to ponder on. . . . . Whether their heroes sang these at such times or not, or whether they were written by poets at a later time, matters little. The people believed in them. In this peculiar branch of poetry the earlier Norsemen stand wholly apart from those of other lands."[3] The peculiar grim humor of this religion and the dark thread of tragedy which pervades it—these characteristics have colored northern thought and have left indelible imprint upon their writings to this day. Hence the call of Grundtvig to his time and people, that the special value of studying Norse mythology was that the people might be able to find themselves, and also be enabled properly to express what is true concerning the great struggle upward in which "noble men" should always take actual part. We are further

See p. 27.

[1] See also V. Rydberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 233.

[2] See Saussaye, *Religion of the Teutons*, p. 340.

[3] *The Viking Age*, Vol. I, p. 389.

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impressed, from a study of this mythology, that this religion was certainly a power operating for good in its time; it gave to the Norse people whatever spiritual life they had, and made them the hardy, adventurous, brave men they were. This ancient belief was concerned mainly with the outward life, solving practical problems as they were met with, and minding little the unknown regions beyond. While "the content of their moralizing certainly does not bear a religious stamp," because "its horizon does not extend beyond the ordinary relations of life and of intercourse between men," yet, as Saussaye concludes his history, it "shows numerous traces of that strength of character and serious caste of mind through which the Teutonic nations have won and maintained their paramount place in history. Regarded in this light, the growth of the pagan centuries bears ample testimony to the fruitfulness of the soil from which it sprang."[1] There are really but two nations that have left permanent impressions upon the communities of modern times—"the Romans and the handful of northern people from the countries beyond the Elbe which had never submitted to the Roman yoke." Wherever this latter people "either settled, mingled, or marauded, they have left permanent traces in society of their laws, institutions, character, and spirit. Pagan and barbarian as they were, they seem to have carried with them something more natural, more suitable, to the social wants of man than the laws and institutions formed under the Roman power." The character of the Roman influences, material and moral, is that of a hard, iron despotism; while that of the Norse "leaves many outlines of freedom and of just principles of social union." Europe without this last and with only the first might have had at this day a civilization "in principle and social arrangement like Russia or Turkey." "All that is or has been of value to man in modern times as a member of society, either in Europe or in the New World, may be traced to the sparks left burning upon our shores by these northern barbarians."[2] Our civil and religious as well as political rights, the principles, spirit, and to a great extent even forms, of legislation through which they work in our social union, are the legitimate offspring of the *things* of the Northmen, in which primary assemblies the free *udal-bondi* made his own laws. And the descendants of these "are now seated on the thrones and in the palaces of Europe, and in the West are making a new world of social arrangements for themselves."[3] In the Norse conceptions and ideals of courage, independence, love of liberty, etc., we may find worthy grounds for the Icelandic republic, the Magna Charta of England, the limited monarchies of Europe, and even the constitution of the United States.

[1] *Religion of the Teutons*, p. 415. [2] S. Laing, *Heimskringla*, pp. 5–7. [3] *Op. cit.*, pp. 106–9.

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